

**TURKEY’S INTERNAL OTHER:  
EMBODIMENTS OF *TAŞRA* IN THE WORKS OF  
ORHAN PAMUK, NURİ BİLGE CEYLAN, AND FATİH AKIN**

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## ABSTRACT

In Turkey, the concept of *taşra* connotes much more than its immediate spatial meaning as those places outside of the city center(s). Its extensive circulation as a trope that indicates externality to modernity is inextricably linked to the specific configurations of the project of Turkish modernization. In this dissertation, I draw from the insights of postcolonial theory and psychoanalysis to develop a novel conceptualization of *taşra*, through which I interpret Turkey's complicated relationship to modernity and its status within the new global order. I argue that a close analysis of the dominant discourses on *taşra* is revealing, for it constitutes one primary site where the predicaments and contradictions of Turkish modernization and national identity-constitution are played out, where collective anxieties around these issues continue to be projected and managed. In my analysis of these discourses, I adopt a deconstructive rather than a corrective approach: my objective is not to reveal what *taşra* "really" is but what work it is made to do.

The contemporary cinematic and literary texts that I engage with in this study are the Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk's memoir *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2005), Turkish-German director Fatih Akin's documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005) and three films by the pioneer of the new genre of *taşra* films in Turkey, Nuri Bilge Ceylan—namely *Climates* (2006), *Three Monkeys* (2008) and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011). Through close readings of these texts, I illustrate how each complicates, affirms and/or expands received understandings of *taşra* that celebrate and/or denounce it as being culturally, spatially and temporally external to modernity.

## **DEDICATION**

To my father Mehmet Erdiñ Özselçuk (1936-2015) who waited enough to see me through.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to think seriously about modern Turkey without invoking the concept of *taşra*. It has been the object of state policies and a domain of struggle for political power; it has intrigued numerous novelists, poets and filmmakers; it has been the explicit subject and/or the constitutive background of popular songs and hit TV series; it has served as a condescending shorthand to indicate a particular kind of cultural difference coded as unmodern or anti-modern. And yet, this oversaturated concept with conflicting significations has a relatively short history. It was only at the end of the nineteenth century that *taşra*, a term used to describe administrative regions outside the centers—a term that indicated provinces—started to connote much more than this immediate meaning. Notably, the term's transformation coincides with the beginning of a process of reformation and modernization in the Ottoman Empire, which at the time was trying to resist the threat of European colonialism (Laçiner, 2005; Alkan, 2005). In this sense, the making of *taşra* is inextricably linked to the specific configuration of modernity and modernization in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> It is precisely in this respect that a close analysis of the discourses on *taşra* is revealing, for it constitutes one primary site where dilemmas and predicaments of Turkish modernization and national identity-constitution are played out, where collective anxieties around these issues continue to be projected and managed.

My dissertation is an extended reflection on contemporary cinematic and literary engagements with this concept. My primary texts are the Nobel Laureate Orhan Pamuk's

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<sup>1</sup> Here is perhaps the place to note that the term "*taşra*" was not always equally central to defining the distinction between center and periphery. For earlier conceptions, see especially Hanioglu (2008); Barkey (2008); Quataert (2000).



memoir *Istanbul: Memories and the City* (2005 [2003]), Turkish-German director Fatih Akin's documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005) and three films by the pioneer of the new genre of *taşra* films in Turkey, Nuri Bilge Ceylan—namely *Climates* (2006), *Three Monkeys* (2008) and *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011). Through close readings of these texts, I illustrate how each complicates, affirms and/or expands received understandings of *taşra* that cherish and/or denounce it as being culturally, spatially and temporally external to modernity.

This is a project that is inspired by and builds upon some recent intellectual deliberations in Turkey that take a poststructuralist approach to thinking about *taşra*. My reflections have been shaped particularly by the articles that appeared in 2005 in the edited volume *Taşraya Bakmak* (“Looking at Taşra”). Representing a variety of disciplinary perspectives, from political science to women's studies, from history to literature, what these articles seemed to me to have shared is a consistent occupation with problematizing the dominant narratives that construct *taşra* rather than *taşra* itself. By shifting the focus in this manner onto the constitution of the dominant narratives, the articles have enabled also an epistemological shift, a new way of “looking at” *taşra*, that sees in it not a pure outside—not the provinces as the binary opposite of the center—but how the center produces *taşra* in this way in the first place to procure its integral unity and facilitate domination of what it produces as “margin.” The insights from this edited volume allowed me to conceive that the particular construction and narrativization of *taşra* as external are indications of the center's own discontinuity with itself; that they point at the center's attempts at covering over and disavowing internal disarray and

disruption through exteriorization (Chakrabarty 2000). Pursuing these lines of thinking, in turn, aided me in conceptualizing *taşra* in this dissertation, especially in my readings of Ceylan's films in Chapter Four, as a constitutive outside in the fashion of the Derridean supplement.

Literary critic Nurdan Gürbilek's (1995) influential essay on what she called "*taşra* gloom" ("*taşra sıkıntısı*") has been instructive in the formulation of some other fundamental ideas in the dissertation. In this compelling essay, the influence of which is also palpable in different ways in most of the articles collected in the volume I referenced above, Gürbilek elaborates on the affective tones of the Turkish novelist Yusuf Atılgan's work. Amongst them, she singles out a pervasive gloom that is associated with a kind of "privation" that "burns and shrivels the subject from the inside" (53-55, my translation). While for Gürbilek "the most naked and visible expression" of such gloom is embodied in *taşra*, she also renders the affect more proximate and familiar by relating it to a much more diffuse existential experience of "confinement" and "internal narrowing" (55-56, my translation). This experience, she explains, is occasioned by the knowledge of an other, better, fuller, more gratifying course of existence (i.e., the center) from which one feels insurmountably excluded. Such knowledge itself is shaped as much by socially-informed fantasy as by the center's dominating presence. Gürbilek discerns the gloom that saturates this experience, in the predicament of a woman, for example, who is "obliged to always sleep in the same bed with an undesired husband" (55, my translation); or she detects it, in another essay, in the kind of disappointment that "urbanites would recognize" on those Sunday afternoons which start to feel "protracted"

upon the realization that the weekend is coming to a close “without having delivered the difference it was anticipated to provide” (1998: 69, my translation).

These insights have been enormously valuable in framing my interpretations, especially those which entail delinking *taşra* from a specific locale and thinking of it more in terms of a widely distributed and differentiated affective geography (see Chapters Two and Four). Gürbilek’s essay also points attention to something that remains unaddressed in her considerations, and this has to do with the relationship between the affective connotations of *taşra* and the particular dynamics of the Turkish modernization project of which *taşra* itself is an effect. With this in mind, in my analyses I have sought to make sense of and expand further on the affective dimensions of *taşra* that Gürbilek invokes in relation to the particular, highly contradictory and ambivalence-ridden history of Turkish modernization. I especially explore the ways in which these dimensions of *taşra* are bound up with a quality of “belatedness”—a quality that the process of modernization has unwittingly installed in the experiences of modernity and national identity in Turkey (Gürbilek, 2003; Koçak, 1996). I delve into this issue particularly in Chapter Two in my reading of Pamuk’s memoir, where I examine how the concept of *taşra* and its extended affective connotations figure in the text’s construing of the relationship between the (induced and assumed) sense of “belatedness” and national identity.

Thinking together the concept of *taşra* with modernization and national identity-formation allows me to situate my research within a larger historical framework that focuses on the predicaments of the project of modernity at large. My engagements with

postcolonial theory are crucial in this respect, especially in consideration of the curious silence in the field of postcolonial studies on the case of Turkey. Sociologist Meltem Ahiska (2003; 2010), who deploys conceptual tools of postcolonial theory in her own work on Turkey, sees Turkey's peculiar history as one significant reason behind this silence. On the one hand, Turkey has an imperial past under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, which up until the eighteenth century dominated over large territories in the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and the Balkans as well as over parts of Russia. On the other hand, even though the Ottoman Empire did not end up as a European colony as such, by the end of the nineteenth century European interference and influence in its political, financial, social and cultural structures and institutions had become profound.<sup>2</sup> The encounter with European colonialism is not limited to this instance in the late history of the Ottoman Empire. At the moment of independence and during the post-independence period, the nationalist movement was very much "conditioned by colonialism and Orientalist hegemony" in the ways it internalized and reproduced the epistemological assumptions and structures of colonialism (Yeğenoğlu,

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<sup>2</sup> The Ottoman Empire was occupied only for a brief period after World War I by Britain, France, Italy and Greece. The occupation came to end in 1922 when the emergent national movement won what is known as the "Turkish Independence War" against the occupiers and overthrew the Ottoman rule as well. While the Empire was never colonized in the sense that it avoided "direct territorial appropriation" and "forthright exploitation of its resources and labor" (McClintock, 1992: 88) as Ahiska explains:

Western capital infiltrated the Ottoman social, economical, and political life starting in the nineteenth century. The low tariff rates in trade [...] led to a flood of imported European goods, which dealt a blow to small craft industries. Economic capitulations given to Western powers and the treaties that endowed European merchants with economic privileges reduced the [Ottoman] government to the status of the gendarmes of foreign capital. In addition to economic colonization, the social life was also colonized due to factors such as the constitution of Western schools and organizations, the invasion of Western technologies and ideas, and the political power enjoyed by Western embassies (2003: 375).

1998: 140). Indeed, European hegemony had largely determined the shape of the modernization process as Westernization. While following the Western blueprint, the nationalist movement inscribed within its discourse the essentialist binaries of colonial domination (the East/West distinction, for instance) and kept these binaries intact even as it reversed them to claim a distinct, authentic, essential national culture and identity (Chatterjee, 1986; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). Thus, even though “Turkey does not neatly fit into the colonialist or postcolonialist scheme of the colonizer and the colonized,” it nevertheless had a constitutive encounter with European colonialism which reorganized the society economically, institutionally, culturally and linguistically and restructured in a profound manner the ways of living and being (Ahiska, 2010: 47).

In this context, I find Stuart Hall’s (1996) understanding of colonialism and postcolonialism particularly illuminating. He considers colonization to be “referenc[ing] the whole process of expansion, exploration [...] and imperial hegemonization which constituted the ‘outer face,’ the constitutive outside, of European and then Western capitalist modernity.” Postcolonial studies, then, designates an intellectual inquiry into the uneven power dynamics of this process that investigates not only the continuing “effects of colonization, but at the same time their displacement from the colonizer/colonized axis to their internalization within the decolonized society itself” (248-49). Within such framing, Turkey constitutes not only a pertinent but a largely uncharted case for the field. In my analyses in this dissertation, on the one hand, I draw from the insights of postcolonial inquiry—from its conceptualizations of postcolonial temporality; from its critiques of Eurocentric narratives of History and modernity, of

Orientalism and postcolonial/post-independence nationalisms; from its explorations into the psychic dimensions of the postcolonial condition—to develop a novel conceptualization of *taşra* through which I interpret Turkey’s complicated relationship to modernity and its status within the new global order. On the other hand, in doing so, I also open up a rich and underexplored archive for postcolonial research and expand its geographical consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

While all the chapters in this dissertation are connected through the overarching theme of *taşra*, each can also be read as an independent piece on its own. In this regard, the dissertation does not follow a linear, progressive narrative. The texts I focus on are clearly not the only ones addressing the subject of *taşra*. Indeed, none of them, with the exception of Ceylan’s *Once upon a Time in Anatolia* is explicitly “about” *taşra* at all. It would thus be possible to write about this issue by focusing on a different canon of works, one that approaches *taşra* more directly and depicts it in more recognizable terms: the early-twentieth century fiction of Halide Edip Adıvar and Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, for example; or more recently, the cinema of Semih Kaplanoğlu.

Yet in all of the texts on which I focus, the concept of *taşra* makes itself felt through a legible set of associations and allusions. All insist that, without thinking about *taşra*, thinking about modernity or identity in contemporary Turkey will be severely hamstrung. The ambivalent, layered and complex ways in which these works take up the concept, the political interventions they make, or the ones they enable, make them

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<sup>3</sup> Such an intervention has already been made in the last decade by a number of scholars whose research, even though it covers different fields than mine, has been extremely influential for my thinking. These scholars include Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1998) in feminist studies, Meltem Ahıska in sociology and media studies (2003; 2010), and Erkan Erçel (2014) in Ottoman historiography.

especially compelling for the present study, which seeks less to repeat dominant understandings than to explore alternative visions of *taşra*. But my selection is not only based on the texts' illuminating and novel insights. These are also works that have enabled significant cultural issues pertaining to Turkey to enter into and become part of a global conversation. Orhan Pamuk's Nobel Prize in 2006, Nuri Bilge Ceylan's several awards at Cannes (including a Palme d'Or in 2014 with his latest film *Winter Sleep*), Fatih Akın's winning of the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival all contributed to the formation of a global audience and widened both popular and scholarly interest in cultural work from Turkey. My aim in this dissertation is also to engage with and expand further on this developing global discussion. It is in this vein that at the beginning of each chapter I introduce relevant national and global debates about the work and/or its creator and hence contextualize my interventions.

The first chapter lays out the project's historical and theoretical framework. I start by tracing the emergence of the concept of *taşra* in its modern form with special attention to the contradictions in that conception, such as its production as simultaneously abject and authentic, corrupt and innocent, stagnated and blissful. I read these contradictions as indicative of an ambivalent encounter with a western model of modernization and as local effects of the “‘first in Europe, then elsewhere’ structure of global historical time” and of modernity (Chakrabarty, 2000: 7). In disclosing the contradictory logic of dominant discourses about *taşra*, I adopt a deconstructive rather than a corrective approach where my objective is not to reveal what *taşra* “really” is but what work it is made to do. In the last section of the chapter I consider how *taşra*'s inclusion and

exclusion get re-negotiated in the last decades of the twentieth century, with Turkey's insertion into the world markets, and under contemporary conditions of global capitalism.

In my second chapter, on Orhan Pamuk, I show how in his *Istanbul: Memories and the City* the author imagines *taşra* as the element within Turkish identity which experiences itself as constitutively inadequate, worthless and always-already belated with respect to the ideal of European modernization. Through a psychoanalytically-informed approach and in light of the recent debates in collective memory and trauma studies around the grieving processes of mourning and melancholia, I regard this experience as the manifestation of a melancholic self-constitution. The modernization movement, in the ways it failed to adequately acknowledge the collective losses occasioned by the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and prohibited their public expression and/or discussion, has contributed to the mystification of the sources of these losses. Such mystification, in turn, has worked to displace foreclosed, unworked-through grief and anger onto the self and led to the experience of loss as some essential self-deficiency which is further fortified by an induced inferiority—by always having to fall short of the instituted ideal of Europe (Forter 2003; Moglen 2007). While Pamuk's memoir renders visible the constitution of this melancholic national subject and even indulges in the debilitating effects of melancholic self-constitution, I argue in the second half of this chapter that through its formal strategies, the text also enacts a sublimation of melancholy that opens up alternative ways of constructing both *taşra* and modern national identity in Turkey.

Chapter Three examines Fatih Akin's documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound*



*of Istanbul*—a film that focuses on the contemporary music scene in the city—while expanding the discussion of *taşra* in a trans-national direction. Here, I shift the focus to the structural affinities between the dynamics of Turkey’s relationship to Europe and that of the national center(s) to *taşra*. My aim in this is to elucidate the constitutive part the European gaze plays in the imaginings of *taşra* in Turkey. I argue that through its narrative structure and narrator’s voice, the documentary latently reproduces Orientalizing assumptions and frameworks and ends up undermining an understanding of hybridity that it purportedly promotes and celebrates as a process of “boundary-blurring transculturation” (Ang, 2001: 198). Unlike Pamuk’s text, which sustains a continuous tension with Orientalizing discourses that the author sometimes shows himself to be repeating, *Crossing the Bridge* appears unaware of its own colonial reinscriptions. While Pamuk’s narrative effectively indicates the sources of its melancholic projections onto the city, Akın’s documentary attaches a sense of longing and sorrow to Istanbul without attempting to qualify such a gesture, despite the participants’ own narration of their experiences of the city that clearly oppose such a representation. Conspicuously, the documentary’s liberal-pluralist interpretation of the bridge in Istanbul as a metaphor for harmonious amalgamation and/or transculturation also collapses halfway through the film. The bridge, instead, transforms into a boundary-marking device which, as it renders Turkey Europe’s *taşra*, at the same time promises the European subject an imaginary voyage over space and time that enables his access to an “authenticity” construed in terms of a reified cultural difference untouched by modernity. I conclude this chapter by analyzing the accounts of two specific participants in the

documentary. These accounts are significant because they reveal the limits of the established significations of the bridge as a metaphor for Turkish identity and culture—significations that are affirmed and circulated in both liberal-pluralist and nationalist discourses—by pointing at what has to be excluded and disavowed to make the metaphor work.

The fourth and last chapter of the dissertation is on three films by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, each of which draws on and complicates different elements of the stereotypical constructions of both *taşra* and the center to which it is conventionally opposed. Overall, Ceylan's *taşras* blur the neat boundaries between the inside and outside, self and other, intimate and foreign. As such they are particularly helpful to understanding the complex, more mobile and fluid, but nevertheless deeply inequitable, forms of inclusion, exclusion and border-making. While in each film *taşra* gets materialized in a different way, all three films imagine it essentially as an internal alterity that destabilizes the “center” that it inhabits. In *Climates*, this center is embodied in a particular, urbanized, educated male subject of the post-coup, capitalism-integrated Turkey, who is shown to “contain” the undesirable qualities ordinarily projected onto *taşra*—qualities associated with stagnation, changeless repetition, isolation, and lack of vigor. In *Three Monkeys*, *taşra* indicates a frontier *within* the urban space and gets incarnated in the underclass migrant family in the metropolitan city, who can neither be fully included nor excluded but is instead relegated to “form a periphery at the very center” of contemporary Turkey (Balibar, 2007: 48). Finally, in *Once upon a Time in Anatolia*, *taşra*, ordinarily constructed as the “pre-modern” provinces, is presented not only as cohabiting the same

present with the “modern” center, but also as a life-world that scientific modernity fails to “metabolize.” (Forter, 2015; Chakrabarty 2000). Precisely in this capacity, through its status as an inassimilable alien inside, *taşra* appears in the film as a site that reveals the limits of modernity.

## CHAPTER I

### CONCEPTS AND FRAMEWORKS:

#### ***TAŞRA* FROM MODERNIZATION TO GLOBALIZATION**

##### **I.1 *Taşra* and Modernization**

The Redhouse Turkish/Ottoman-English dictionary offers three distinct translations for the word *taşra*: (1) “the outside;” (2) “out, outwards;” (3) “province.” While these definitions of the word seem neutral, Ömer Laçiner draws attention to the cloaked power relations *taşra* suggests in Turkish history. According to Laçiner (2005), *taşra* evokes a “hierarchical and strained relationship” which became particularly palpable in the late Ottoman period between the center, Istanbul, where the Ottoman Palace was located, and the peripheries (14, my translation). *Taşra*, which was left to its own devices up until the period of reformation in the mid-nineteenth century, turned into a troubling and troublesome geography in the face of the bureaucratic reforms necessitated by a more centralized administration of the empire. Cultural critic Şükrü Argın (2005) maintains that *taşra*’s relative isolation and its wariness towards the center before the introduction of reforms was in part a strategy of survival. According to Argın, keeping a distance from the center was a way to evade and even manipulate centralized control and create room for independent social, political and economic activity. Thus, the implementation of the modernization reforms created tension between the center and the subjects in *taşra* who grew increasingly apprehensive about losing their relative autonomy (Durakbaşı, 2010).

With the establishment of the Republic, the attempts at “integrating” *taşra* into the modernization project intensified. They included the relocation of the new capital in

Ankara, away from the old imperial capital of Istanbul into the center of Anatolia; efforts to create a native industry, hence the creation of a new, state-supported, national working class and bourgeoisie; the establishment of People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) in central and eastern regions which provided formal education to adults as well as access and exposure to arts, sports and social services; the establishment of Village Institutes (*Köy Enstitüleri*) that granted free training in farming, agriculture, arts and crafts, and the hard sciences to successful students in rural areas, who subsequently became "teachers" in their own communities; and the institution of military officers' clubs, trade associations and community centers in small towns and villages. All of these efforts at modernization functioned towards enculturating and "civilizing" *taşra* along the lines of the dominant, official ideology of modernization. In fact, as Laçiner points out, these "islands of civilization" were installed in *taşra* as agents and embodiments of modernity and purported Enlightenment against earlier, more traditional forms of authority, such as the village imam or the landowners (Laçiner, 2005: 21; Türkeş, 2005).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In mid-1950s Village Institutes and People's Houses were closed down by the new conservative government under the Democrat Party (DP). One of the decisive factors behind their closure was DP's conviction that these institutions propagated communism and socialism. As an advocate of private enterprise and ownership, the DP government was particularly wary of the Village Institutes which actively encouraged producers to form cooperatives. Given the general post-war anti-communist sentiment around the world, the DP government did not have much difficulty forming alliances with the local *taşra* bourgeoisie, comprised mainly of large land-owners and small merchants to crack down on the perceived threat of communism. Such economic alliances also had ideological implications that manifested themselves in the formation and support of nationalist groups in *taşra* that functioned as buffers against communism. However, under the pretext of anti-communism, these groups also attacked basic democratic rights and practices. The discourse of anti-communism also coalesced with discourses that were critical of modernization and westernization in general. The latter were deemed "degenerate" and held responsible for the erosion of "authentic" traditional values and beliefs (Laçiner, 2005). While conservatism fused with Turkish nationalism with strong religious undertones became a dominant ideology in *taşra* post-1950s, there were also exceptions to this trend, particularly in the Kurdish and/or Alevi towns.

In this context, Argin (2005) also suggests that the particular manner in which the Republican modernizers tried to incorporate *taşra* had the paradoxical effect of sharpening the divide between it and the metropolitan center. Rather than an agent or a partaker in this process, *taşra* was constructed mainly, or merely, as its addressee. It was a domain to be developed and regulated. People of *taşra* were to be educated, refined and brought into maturity/modernity as citizens of a modern state. In this sense, one can see the modernization of *taşra* as part of a self-colonizing process. As historian Halil Berktaş elaborates:

[The local modernizing elite] adopted the “white men’s mission” and imposed this mission on the people, on the subjects of a traditional empire and on its infrastructure with all the possible Eurocentric, Orientalist implications such a mission could involve. This meant not only restructuring the society according to the model of Western modernity, but attempting to rethink, map out and represent that society in terms of the categories of Western modernity, in terms of its specific forms of inclusion/exclusion (2005: 187, my translation).

I find it crucial to indicate here that during this process of homogenization through modernization and social engineering, there was some significant realignment in the designation of center and periphery, at least within the parameters of the official ideology. In this period, Istanbul’s status as the center of economic and cultural activity was fundamentally challenged. This city was not only too evocative of the Ottoman heritage that the nationalist modernizers sought to disengage from, but also had a multi-ethnic population. *Rums* (ethnically Greek citizens or residents of Turkey), Jews and

Armenians of Istanbul made up a large section of the traders, skilled workers, and craftsmen who controlled a significant portion of economic activity. As such the new regime perceived these groups as a threat and impediment not only to the emergence of a homogenous nation but also to the spawning of a “native” working class and bourgeoisie. Ankara, on the other hand, located at the inner hinterland of the new Turkey, was deemed “uncontaminated” and was presented as the new center of the new nation. Hence, during the heyday of the nationalist modernization project between 1923 and 1950, most of the economic and cultural investments were channelled into Ankara. In this new structuralization, the state basically abandoned Istanbul. Left to its own devices, the city shrank in population and dwindled radically until after the 1950s when it started receiving massive flows of people from *taşra* due to the mechanization of agriculture and hence increased redundancy rates in agricultural employment, developments in the infrastructure and technologies of transportation, and also due to the failings of the economic policies of the modernization project in the peripheries. It was only in the 1970s that Istanbul started to surge again as a center albeit in the grip of unplanned development that led to an uncontrollable urban sprawl in years to come. Yet, decades of homogenization and nationalization policies and practices unsoldered the cosmopolitan texture of the city and by this time Istanbul was almost entirely Turkified (Keyder, 2000; Kuyucu, 2005).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In 1942, a Wealth Tax was levied on “wealthy citizens” in the aims to curb profits from speculative economic activities that took advantage of the war-time conditions. Although in theory the tax was to be imposed on every citizen above a certain income level, in practice non-Muslim citizens were taxed at much higher—and arbitrarily established—rates than their Muslim counterparts. As a result of taxation, many non-Muslim merchants and industrialists had to claim bankruptcy and close down their businesses. Those who were unable to pay such exorbitant dues were forced to settle their debt through manual labour in

Such shifts and fluctuations in the determination and configuration of the center(s) and peripheries are indicative of the dynamic, discontinuous, unstable character of these constructions. In this sense, it is more appropriate to think of these constructions in terms of *relations* rather than objective, fixed, and generalizable categories in themselves. The meaning and designation of center and *taşra*, as well as what is included and excluded in these definitions, are not only contingent upon the particular political, social, economic and cultural conditions of a period, but also determined by power relations. The concepts of *taşra* and center cannot really be thought as autonomous and meaningful entities in and of themselves, since it is only through their relation to each other that they gain their meanings.

In this context, as Nurdan Gürbilek (1995) suggests, in order for *taşra* to acquire a meaning, in order for it to be identified and identify itself as *taşra*, there has to be a center

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labour camps established in Aşkale, a town in the Eastern part of Turkey, under particularly harsh winter conditions. There were not any Muslim citizens sent to these camps. As a result of taxation about 50,000 non-Muslim citizens, most of whom were residing in Istanbul, left Turkey (Bali, 2006; Kuyucu, 2005). Also see Ayhan Aktar (2000) for a detailed analysis of the conditions and implications of the Wealth Tax.

On September 6-7, 1955 non-Muslim neighbourhoods and businesses in Istanbul were attacked, pillaged, and burned down by mobs organized and supported by the government and Turkish Intelligence Service. The events which originated from the growing tension between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus and fortified by the economic crisis in Turkey, quickly escalated into violent riots. The target of attacks shifted from *Rums* only to include Armenians and Jews, while the mobs were joined by an enraged public stirred with the nationalist rhetoric of the media and the government. Between 1955 and 1960, approximately 20,000 *Rums* emigrated from Turkey (Kuyucu, 2005).

In 1964, the antagonism between Turkey and Greece over Cyprus peaked once again. The government of Turkey unilaterally annulled the treaty of residence, free movement of persons, and goods with Greece and issued a law that cancelled the resident permits of *Rums* with Greek passports. Approximately 40,000 were deported and/or forced to leave Turkey because of the pervasive culture of ethno-religious discrimination, harassment and intimidation (Keyder, 2000; Kuyucu, 2005).

I cite these three particular events because they are connected to the broader ethno-national homogenization policies and practices of the Turkish state and governments which aimed to construct a unitary nation out of the multi-ethnic population inherited from the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, these policies and practices worked towards dismantling/dispossessing the non-Muslim bourgeois class and substituting it with a Turkish-Muslim bourgeoisie who appropriated the capital of the former (Bali, 2006). As a result of these policies and practices and in conjunction with the popular support for ethnocentric Turkish-nationalism, anti-minoritism, and xenophobia, the non-Muslim population of Turkey has now dwindled to miniscule numbers.



that marginalizes and fixes it as subordinate and lacking in comparison to that center. The center not only constitutes itself as wholesome and superior through this marginalization but also establishes itself as the standard against which *taşra* is propelled continuously to measure itself:

In order for *taşra* to distinguish itself as *taşra*, it has to discern that there is another course of existence from which it is withheld; that there is a center towards whose margins it is pushed out. [*Taşra*] has to perceive itself through the eyes of this center before which it feels lacking and deprived. The horizon of *taşra* is always the big city. It is the big city that both extends and constricts *taşra*'s horizon and renders it *taşra*. It is only through the formation of such perception that *taşra* begins to appear so narrow and suffocating to those who reside in it (Gürbilek, 1995: 57, my translation).

Following upon Arın's (2005) observations, I contend that it was particularly with the commencement of the modernization project that *taşra* emerged as such a space and as a form of existence defined predominantly in pejorative terms:

With the establishment of Republic, *taşra* became the home not only of poverty but also of deprivation. Besides the poor, the rich of the *taşra* also received their share from this feeling of destitution. [...] Gradually, the serenity of being in place was replaced by a feeling of being somewhat in the 'wrong-place'" (Arın, 2005: 277, my translation).

Through what Arın defines as "a process of radical intervention," and imposition, the modernization project in a way forced *taşra* to recognize the domination of the center as

the original model to be followed. Yet, while the center was introduced as a model, *taşra* was also never allowed to become more than an inadequate copy. No matter how hard *taşra* tried to catch up with and emulate, so to speak, the center, these attempts never seemed “good enough” since in a paradoxical way, in the post-republican period, the center was endowed with qualifications that *taşra* could not *by definition* acquire (Argın, 2005: 280-281).

The problem here lies not so much with *taşra*’s “failure” in accomplishing the tasks set out for it, in its “inability” to duplicate the model of the center or with some inherent disposition it has against modernity and modernization, as some essentialist and culturalist accounts have claimed, but with the very logic that underlies the configuration of center/*taşra*, model/copy dichotomies. In this logic, while difference of the latter term is for the most part subsumed under some kind of absence, failure and lack, this is overlain and justified by the assumption of an insurmountable temporal difference between the two domains. This notion of insurmountable temporal difference is in its turn constitutive of the ideology of progress implicit in the project of Enlightenment. Narratives of modernization, development, and transition, or those of belated modernities and uneven development, are informed to various degrees by such an ideology and sustained by unquestioned investments in the idea of a single, universal, homogenous unfolding of historical time identified with the “constantly onward-moving chronological sequence of the West” (Ahiska, 2003: 354; Chakrabarty, 2000; Mitchell, 2000). In these historicist accounts, modernity is assumed to have already taken place in particular center(s). Invariably Europe is designated as the “primary habitus of the modern” even

though the specific locations of centers within Europe vary and are often multiple (Chakrabarty, 2000: 43). This historicist, Eurocentric understanding, by positing Europe as the “original stage” of modernity, assigns all non-European experiences of modernity a quality of belatedness, derivation, second-handedness. Such a positing produces a rift in the temporal coordinates of Europe and non-Europe. Prefigured as the followers of the former, the latter are in a way arrested in the temporality of eternal pastness—they are always already late, lagging/lacking in relation to Europe where “real” time unstoppably unfolds towards the future (Ahiska, 2003). In this structural “denial of coevalness” Europe’s present is produced as non-Europe’s future, whereas the latter’s present corresponds to Europe’s past (Fabian qtd. in Chakrabarty, 2000: 8).

Dipesh Chakrabarty undertakes a project of decentering such narratives in his *Provincializing Europe* (2000). He associates this perpetual time-lag with the space of the “waiting-room.”<sup>6</sup> Non-European peoples and nations are suspended in the interval of this room, where they need to first wait to develop and “ripen,” get prepared (so to speak) to take their place in the stage of modernity (249). Yet, given the presumption that Europe is the center, the single space where History is enacted, all other histories cannot but remain lagging in the waiting-room, since in the unitary, homogenous progression of historicist time, “catching up” becomes structurally impossible.

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<sup>6</sup> In Chakrabarty’s elaborations on this idea of the “waiting-room” one can detect the presence of Walter Benjamin as an invisible interlocutor. In his deliberations in “On the Concept of History,” where he criticizes historicist projections of the past, Benjamin points out a problem in the philosophy of the Social Democratic party which adheres to an “additive” and developmentalist movement of history and “[transforms] the empty and homogenous time into an *anteroom*” where, it is assumed that, “one can wait for the emergence of the revolutionary consciousness with more or less equanimity” (2003[1940]: 402, emphasis is mine).

From within this framework, I want to propose that *taşra* emerges as the sign of the “waiting-room” in the dominant narratives of Turkey’s modernization project. As I indicated before, in these narratives, *taşra* is defined in terms of lack or absence in relation to the center, but its construction as such follows from and is rationalized by a prior assumption that regards *taşra* as always(-already) lagging behind the center. What I want to emphasize here is that the nationalist modernizers, in a paradoxical move, adopted and reinscribed the Eurocentric, historicist temporal paradigm locally in their approach to *taşra*. As Chakrabarty argues in the context of the relations between Europe and non-Europe, the modernizers in Turkey also “posited historical time as a measure of the cultural distance assumed to exist” between the center and *taşra* (2000: 7). Indeed, the center-*taşra* relationship is haunted by Turkey’s relationship to Europe, under whose gaze it stands as one other site of “belated modernity” and hence bears the mark of lack, inadequacy or incompleteness. As Argin (2005) suggests, in Turkey, the center’s gaze on *taşra* always implies a second gaze, an internalized Western gaze, which judges, defines, fixes *taşra* through Western eyes. As the center looks on at *taşra*, it is also at the same time being looked at by the Western gaze incorporated within. The lack, inadequacy, “underdevelopment” that the center locates in *taşra* is an index of how the center imagines itself to be seen by Europe. In this sense, it is apt to say that the center projects onto *taşra* what has been projected onto Turkey through the Eurocentric, colonizing and orientalizing logic that regulates the single, universal, and homogeneous constructions of modernity.

## **I.2. Between the Abject and the Authentic: The Production of *Taşra* as Supplement in Modern Turkey**

In his article on the construction of *taşra* in Turkish novels from the 1920s to the 2000s, literary critic Ömer Türkeş (2005) draws attention to the recurrent nature of the descriptions and metaphors that are used to mark *taşra* as an outside: “Dusty roads, dirty hotels, dilapidated houses, perishingly cold or oppressively hot weather conditions, desolate train stations, dark towns” are but some of the sustained terms in which *taşra* was produced in these novels (161, my translation). Time seems to have stopped in these arid, stagnant spaces which do not seem to show much diversity regardless of one’s specific geographic location. People that reside in *taşra* are like the “living dead” who have lost their vigour, who live without any future prospects or hopes (172). Figured as unsophisticated and inarticulate, they are devoid of the ability to shape their own lives and unable to undertake and perform the responsibilities of adulthood. They are either oblivious about culture or blindly driven by it to such an extent that their lives are perceived to be organized by unbounded and unregulated cultural beliefs.

Stuck in a state of permanent childhood, *taşra* “natives” are also depicted as having a mutilated relationship with sexuality. As a taboo subject, sexuality is repressed in *taşra* more fiercely than in any other place. It is something that is either assumed not to exist or takes the form of excess. While marriage comprises the only legitimate access to sexual experience, it certainly does not guarantee a loving relationship between equals. Forced or arranged marriages, rape and abuse are rampant in this imaginary construction and affect both men and women. Yet, women live perhaps the most downtrodden existences in *taşra*. In the novels discussed by Türkeş, there is a special emphasis on the oppressed

state of *taşra* women under conservative and firmly entrenched patriarchal conditions. Since the mobility of women is highly restricted compared to men—some of whom can actually leave *taşra* for work or study, or simply out of a restlessness to escape the dreary circumstances—*taşra* women are depicted as doomed to live their lives there, changing hands amongst men. Deprived of any real agency, these women are caught between possessive safeguarding and outright cruelty in the hands of fathers, brothers, husbands and under the deeply seated male chauvinism that pervades *taşra* (Çur, 2005; Suner, 2005; Türkeş, 2005).

Change is introduced into this ominous place only from the outside. Since *taşra* is figured as a space moored in the past and as ineluctably arrested in repetition, any sort of dynamism or future-orientation is initiated through institutions that are representatives of modernity (community centers, schools, clubs, theatres, etc.), or through the arrival of an “ideal, modern citizen”—an educated, cultured figure whose profession marks him (or much less frequently, “her”) as a stand-in for such institutions (teacher, doctor, military officer, mayor, journalist).

As both Türkeş (2005) and Arğın (2005) intimate these repeated narratives about *taşra* which manifest themselves in dominant political and economic policies as well as in literature, are permeated with an orientalizing logic. This logic is discernable in the ways that *taşra* is abjected as some ontologically, spatially and temporally yonder domain and (re)produced monolithically as immutable, vulgar, small-minded and primitive. It is also important to note here that, particularly in the case of literature, most of what came to define *taşra* was written by “outsiders,” i.e., middle/upper-middle class,

urbanized intellectuals and authors based in the centers, Istanbul or Ankara, some of whom had not even been to the places they so meticulously described, but relied instead on already existing expositions. In this sense literary works on *taşra* have a derivative quality about them; this accounts for the recurrence of certain descriptors, metaphors and figures of speech in the novels that Türkeş (2005) maps out in his article. These authors approached *taşra* in their writings much as an Orientalist traveler or scholar approached “the Orient” as “a topic of learning and discovery,” from the perspective of a detached onlooker who tries to analyze, figure out and domesticate the Orient’s foreignness (Said, 1994: 73).

Alongside such production of *taşra* as negation of modernity, however, there also exists a glorification of *taşra* as a source of authenticity. In this articulation, *taşra* comes to signify the authentic inner kernel, the unadulterated native self. Historically speaking, what can be called a romantic idealization of *taşra* was in fact part and parcel of the Kemalist modernization discourse from the beginning, as one of the means to establish the cultural difference and autonomy of the newly emerging nation-state from the West and to claim cultural authenticity. In the 1950s, with the consolidation of political conservatism and the rise of populist-ethnocentric Turkish nationalism, the sanctification of *taşra* as a space of authentic identity intensified (Laçiner, 2005). While the “othering” of *taşra* persisted, alongside it there emerged a populist romanticization of *taşra* as the “repository of folk wisdom,” of unsullied indigenous culture and identity (Kandiyoti, 1997: 122). In this discourse, people of *taşra* depicted as benevolent, forbearing and dignified were often pitted against the over-westernized, self-centered, inauthentic

urbanites. Infused with nostalgia and mystification, this discourse helped to congeal *taşra* as some sort of a living memorial to a presumed authenticity prior to modernization (Bora, 2005; Arın, 2005).

In her analysis of what she calls “popular nostalgia films” of contemporary Turkish cinema, Asuman Suner (2005, 2010) explores this ambivalent construction of *taşra* as a space of both felicity and deprivation. Drawing on Gaston Bachelard’s ([1958] 1994) articulation of the “house” as a space of protection, affection and childhood bliss, Suner argues that in these popular films *taşra* is produced as a similar space, associated with notions of belonging, safety, sincerity, intimacy and inclusion. Here, *taşra* is conceived as a zone of recovered bliss. It is imagined, once again, as a space outside of and untainted by modernity and its values. Yet, this time, these characteristics are framed as merits rather than defects. This is a closed, fantasy space of harmony; a familiar and familial space of community where people know and trust each other. In these narratives, the harmony is consistently shown to be shattered with the intrusion of an element from the outside. In other words, contact with the outside seems always to beget some kind of disaster. As a result, communal ties irreparably disintegrate; innocence is tarnished and tragedy descends on unsuspecting victims (Suner, 2005; 2010).

Despite their apparent celebration of *taşra*, I see these narratives as sharing a common motif with those that abject *taşra*, one that reveals a deeper structural complementarity. This motif has to do with how the celebratory narratives infantilize *taşra* dwellers. In the face of adversities that strike them, *taşra* “natives” are rendered naive and utterly helpless. They are easily manipulable, incapable of dealing with life’s



contingencies, managing problems or making firm decisions. In this sense, they are depicted as simply submitting to what fate metes out to them. Here, the articulation of notions of childhood, innocence and purity to the concept of *taşra* is quite symptomatic in the way it implicitly subscribes to the developmentalist temporal paradigm of modernization that I analyzed earlier. As Suner notes, *taşra* is idealized as a space and time of some dreamy childhood bliss, a lost yet longed-for “period of collective childhood” (2010: 41). She further states that even when the narratives take place in the present time, *taşra* is still represented as a space frozen in the past, tied up with affects and behaviour patterns that are associated with conventional conceptualizations of childhood. However, contrary to the narratives that marginalize *taşra* as a state of permanent childhood to insinuate backwardness, underdevelopment or stagnation, these nostalgic fetishizations now celebrate this state as the token of an imagined harmonious past that is aggrieved by inexorable and invariably-destructive forces of modernity. What remains constant in both narratives is the inscription of *taşra*’s juvenility, either as something to be protected and cherished or as a state to be surmounted. Put differently, both these narratives try to assign *taşra* a particular place and a particular task in the attempts to constitute and legitimize the integrity of the nationalist modernization project on the one hand, and to cover over its contradictions, on the other. These discursive manoeuvres try to appropriate *taşra* either as an emblem of the pre-/non-modern that needs rehabilitation or as a sign of some inner, overarching authentic identity. *Taşra* itself becomes in the process an elusive and protean concept. It takes shape according to the

provisional demands and needs of dominant discourses of modernization and national identity to constitute and project themselves as complete, coherent and consistent.

In this regard, I discern a structural resemblance between *taşra* as concept and the Derridean notion of the supplement. In his essay “...That Dangerous Supplement...,” Derrida (1997) speaks about two different meanings of the word “supplement” which he subsequently argues to be based in a shared logic. In the first meaning, the supplement suggests an “addition;” “it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude [...] It cumulates and accumulates presence” (144). By common logic, then, the supplement is assigned a quality of exteriority. To be added on, the supplement must be figured as exterior to that which it is appended to (Culler, 1986). In the second meaning, Derrida continues, “the supplement supplements”: it acts as a substitute, “it adds only to replace” (145). By virtue of it being a substitute, the supplement, here too, is produced as being outside of the entity it is substituting for; “in order to [replace something, the substitute] must be other than it” (145). What Derrida deems as the “strange” and “dangerous economy of the supplement” proceeds from the shared presumption underlying both meanings of the supplement that posits it as being *external* to the entity being supplemented. For if an entity necessitates cumulation and/or substitution to assert its presence and fullness, then it cannot be full, complete, present prior to this process. The condition of possibility for the constitution of internal coherence and fullness is the supplement. Put differently, the supplement adds or replaces “in order to complete, to compensate for a lack in what was supposed to be complete in itself” (Culler, 1986: 103).

In this precise sense, the supplement is a precarious term. It is both necessary—for the constitution of coherence, fullness, presence—and formidable, because even as it aids in securing fullness, the supplement sabotages this process by marking the lack it is filling and hence heralding the impossibility of originary fullness (Derrida, 1997). Hence the supplement is “called upon and repelled at the same time” (Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 78). The strange, dangerous and paradoxical status of the supplement resides in its concurrent capacities “to infect and to cure” (Culler, 1986: 142).

Furthermore, this dual capacity makes it untenable to think of the supplement as purely exterior to the positivity it assists in procuring. Neither, though, can it be fully assimilated into the interior, since it plagues the positivity from the inside by indexing the lack that precludes unity, consistency and fullness. Simultaneously intimate and foreign, the supplement in fact throws into crisis the neat distinctions between the inside and the outside. Situated at a peculiar and inarticulable place where interiority converges with exteriority, the supplement remains elusive and opaque. Elaborating on this cryptic logic of the supplement, Derrida writes:

Something promises itself as it escapes, gives itself as it moves away, and strictly speaking it cannot even be called presence. Such is the constraint of the supplement, such, exceeding all the language of metaphysics, is the structure “almost inconceivable to reason.” *Almost* inconceivable: simple irrationality, the opposite of reason, are less irritating and waylaying for classical logic. The supplement is maddening because it is neither presence nor absence (1997: 154).

In light of this passage, let me try and tease out more clearly my reasoning behind conceptualizing *taşra* as supplement. As I indicated, in the dominant discourses of modernization and national identity-constitution, or what one might describe as the Kemalist project of modernization and nation-building, *taşra* is assigned two significant yet seemingly conflicting positions. On the one hand, it is constructed as the Other of modernity, imbued with qualifications and essences that are antithetical to the modern identity defined by the modernizing elites. On the other hand, it is produced as one of the sources of authenticity that differentiates the nation from the West, more precisely from Europe. However, I do not consider these two discourses as divergent as they may seem at first glance. Rather, I consider them as attempts—within the limits of available discursive constructions—to contain, domesticate and make sense out of the obscurity that *taşra*, as a concept, introduces into the established systems of meaning. Having said that, I also want to emphasize that *taşra* is not an autonomous element that intervenes from the outside and instigates this destabilization of meaning on the inside. On the contrary, *taşra* is an effect, a surplus, generated by the very system of meaning that it undermines.

As I have demonstrated, within one vein of the dominant, Kemalist modernization discourses *taşra* represents an essential other, that which one cannot and should not be if one is to sustain a consistent, unified modern identity—however “illusionary,” temporary and partial this sense of stability might be. As the essentialized other, *taşra* is pushed to the margins; it is subordinated, segregated in/as an exteriority. But it is also not possible for the modern identity that the elites are seeking to establish to constitute itself without

referencing *taşra* in some way as the non-self/non-modern or as an *additional* element, a plenitude, that enhances and validates identity. Without *taşra*, the modern (in Turkey) cannot exist. Despite its construction as peripheral, marginal or extrinsic, and, in fact, precisely on account of this process of exclusion, *taşra* takes part in constituting and sustaining the internal consistency and unity of dominant Kemalist modernization discourses and the modern identity they create. The ambivalence towards *taşra* that is conveyed through its exclusion as abject and inclusion as authentic, the repulsion and sympathy that accompanies these processes, comes from the amorphous dimension that *taşra* embodies and enacts as supplement.

It is therefore not surprising to see that, in Turkey, some recent and sophisticated deliberations on *taşra* draw considerable attention to its vagueness and obscurity as a concept. Even a quick scrutiny of these discussions reveals the constant slipperiness one confronts with every attempt to speak about *taşra*, regardless of the perspective or approach adopted. For instance, in his article Argın (2005) talks of *taşra* as a word with “nomadic” connotations. He writes: “Even though *taşra* points at a place, in itself it is a homeless word. It is a nomadic word, so to speak. It points at, marks and flees” (273, my translation). Similarly, in his article on the predicaments of producing literary work from *taşra*, poet and cultural critic Ahmet Bozkurt (2004) refers to *taşra* as “subsisting in an exilic dimension” (76, my translation). According to Bozkurt, “*taşra* always stands in the threshold” (76). In Asuman Suner’s study of contemporary Turkish cinema, to which I referred earlier, *taşra* is defined as being “neither this nor that” —neither the big city nor the village, neither outside nor inside—but a state of in-betweenness (2005: 55).

Certainly these analyses have been insightful and inspirational for the debates and ideas that I take up in this dissertation. Yet I also detect a crucial drawback in them: they do not pursue the implications of their own perceptive arguments to the end. While these articulations constitute valuable contributions to more nuanced and complex understandings of *taşra*, they fall short at explaining how, in the first place, *taşra* comes to signify the liminality that they all seem to suggest. In other words, these articulations do not quite address or explicate the production of *taşra* as liminality. Without an engagement with production, the qualities and capacities that are attributed to *taşra* carry the risk of essentialism. That is to say, without a reference to their production these qualities seem as if they are innate and pre-given. Such conceptions are also prone to inadvertent romanticizations and valorizations of *taşra* per se, as a locus of resistance. In this context, my earlier engagements with critiques of Eurocentric, historicist, developmentalist theories of modernity, as well as my discussion of deconstructionist theory, are attempts at addressing this oversight in the emerging critical literature on *taşra*.

### **I.3. The “internally-excluded”: *Taşra* as Supplement in Global Capitalism**

The new social, political and economic conditions that emerged in the 1980s in Turkey have particular significance for understanding the shifts in the meaning of *taşra* that concern me in the chapters to follow. In this period, the implementation of economic structural adjustment programs and Turkey’s transformation from a state-directed, closed economy to an open market economy prompted a range of modifications in the

relationship between *taşra* and the center. The economic liberalization program put into place was accompanied by some limited and highly-monitored social, political and cultural liberalization processes. Yet, despite the repressive climate that the military coup of 1980 generated, the political arena that had so far been dominated by a left-right polarization has slowly come to be claimed by hitherto socially-invisible and excluded groups like women, Kurds, Islamists, environmentalists, and LGBTs. For this reason, the end of the 1980s and the 1990s, a period of complex political, social, economic and cultural transformation ridden with contradictions, is considered by some as the period of emergence and establishment of an oppositional civil society. These groups focused particularly on the paternalistic authoritarianism of Kemalist ideology and its modernization project. Thus, a process has commenced whereby previously clogged channels of public debate around what had so far been deemed rather “touchy” issues, such as the definition and principles of secularism, Turkey’s ethnic composition, human rights, minority rights, definitions of citizenship, were at least partially opened (Keyder, 2006; Suner, 2005: 20-22).

This period also witnessed a fundamental restructuring of the political and economic bodies of power. The military coup and the implementation of new neoliberal economic policies contributed to the rise of a new class of elites. One of the significant and common features that differentiated this new generation of entrepreneurs and political figures from the former was their close ties to *taşra* (Taşkın, 2008). In contrast to the previous generations of elites who defined themselves primarily as Kemalist, militantly-secular, and established urbanites, the new elites, who brought together

conservative and Islamic values with capitalist ambition and neo-liberal ethics, were not only from *taşra*, but represented their connections to *taşra* as an indispensable constituent of their identities (Erder, 2000). The latter also publicly voiced their criticisms of Kemalism, especially with regards to its strict and monolithic interpretation of secularism, its statism and authoritarian tendencies. The new wave of liberalism and pluralism, which enabled the expression of previously repressed particularisms—such as ethnic and/or religious attachments—has also assisted the new elite’s openly reactionary and “unapologetic” embrace of an often *taşra*-embedded identity.

From the perspective of the Kemalist elites and the urbanized, Westernized, middle/upper-middle classes that identify with Kemalism, this new configuration was interpreted as a threat and an audacious assault on established values and principles. The issue was not only and simply about sharing power with and/or relaying power to another body, but perhaps more significantly about who this body was. While the displaced elite responded in anger and resentment to the substantial loss they experienced in their socio-economic and political power and privileges, they pointed these energies specifically at what was perceived as a “virus-like” spawning of “*taşra* culture” in the heart of centers, particularly in the grand-center of Istanbul. In the eyes of the displaced elite, the “culprits” of this culture were not just the new elites who symbolically and financially supported it, but also domestic migrants who transported the “culture” and “aesthetic” of *taşra* to the center.<sup>7</sup> The latter were not complete strangers to the city dwellers; flows of

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<sup>7</sup> I find it important to note that there also existed the possibility of articulating and crystallizing this anger and resentment towards a systematic, political questioning of the neo-liberal restructuralization programmes which were/are responsible for the gradual abrasion of the middle-class, increasing disparities



migration from small towns and villages had already begun in the 1950s, largely due to the failings of the economic policies to respond to the needs and demands in these areas. Yet, internal migrations considerably intensified in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly from the Eastern, predominantly Kurdish provinces. Violent clashes between the Kurdish resistance movement and Turkish armed forces as well as the systematic repressive practices on Kurdish citizens were the main reasons of this migration. In this regard, the intensification of migration flows became one other basis for the justification of the hostility in the big cities, especially in the metropolis of Istanbul, against migrants from *taşra*.

We can summarize these transformations by saying that, since the 1980s, Turkey has undergone a fundamental dislocation of political power structures, a tension-ridden changeover of capital, massive translocations of people, and a disarticulation and rearrangement of hegemonic social and cultural parameters. The relationship between center and *taşra* was directly implicated in such seismic transformation. As Laçiner (2005) notes:

The period when center and *taşra* referred to distinct geographies, distinct socio-economic and political formations, and denoted the hierarchical relationship between them, is now over. This is a new period where, the tension that was

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in the distribution of wealth, precarization of labour, etc. However, such a possibility was not realized in Turkey in the 1980s. I'd argue that the mutilation of the political left during and in the aftermath of the 1980-coup contributed to this inability to form organized and articulate resistances. In the absence of such alternative imaginaries, the anger and resentment, especially of the politically, culturally, economically dislocated middle classes, were more readily displaced on the somewhat easy scapegoats, on the immediate, already-existing receptacles of otherness.

construed and experienced within this old configuration has now moved into the centers and permeated into the face of the whole country (36, my translation). Accordingly, under conditions of high mobility and fluidity, sustaining and managing previous forms of inclusion and exclusion, which attempt neatly to demarcate and seal self and otherness into bounded spaces of interiority and exteriority, becomes more difficult. These older forms are neither effective nor flexible enough to regulate an otherness that steps out of its assigned place in the dominant order and transgresses previously established boundaries of inside and outside.<sup>8</sup> This is not to suggest that older forms of inclusion and exclusion were suddenly and entirely superseded. Rather, I want to emphasize the fact that the new conditions called for new, more malleable ways of marking interiority and exteriority to arrange, move and/or fix bodies whenever necessary.

According to Étienne Balibar (2002; 2005; 2007) globalization, which has created similar destabilizations of borders and boundaries around the world, occasioned the proliferation of “internal exclusion” as a powerful instrument to mark and manage otherness. Balibar articulates this category as a specific form of inclusion which becomes “inverted and [reaches] the point of excluding those who, from inside, are deemed to be impossible or unnecessary to include, or in the end whose exclusion is deemed necessary for the inclusion of all others to take place and become effective” (2005: 32).<sup>9</sup> While Balibar highlights that internal exclusion is invoked as “a common structural feature of

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<sup>8</sup> Here, when I speak of “stepping out” or “transgression,” I do not assign a necessary intentionality to these acts.

<sup>9</sup> I want to draw particular attention here to the structural affinities between the paradoxical logic of supplementarity that I talked about in the previous section and the equally paradoxical logic of internal exclusion.

all traditional forms of racism,” he argues that conditions of globalization have not only rendered its application all the more regular and frequent but in this process also induced “various forms of new racism” (2005: 31). Globalization, particularly through the capitalist market, blurs the distinctions between proximity and distance, native and foreign, inside and outside. This blurring demands a shift in the structures of exclusion since, as Balibar notes, “in such a global space you cannot have *external spaces for Otherness*, you can only have ubiquitous ‘limbos’ where those who are neither assimilated and integrated nor immediately eliminated, are forced to remain” (2005: 31). In this regard, internal exclusion emerges as a means of “regulating toleration and aversion,” enabling “discrimination, stigmatization of groups and preferential violence” in culturally mixed societies where diverse populations live together (Balibar, 2005: 31; Brown, 2006).

I wish to interpret what has transpired in post-1980 Turkey in regards to the *taşra*-center relations within such a theoretical framework, the framework that calls attention to the category of internal exclusion. Ayşe Öncü (2000) demonstrates the effects of these discourses and practices through her study of the media representations in the 1980s and 1990s of otherness<sup>10</sup> in urban contexts. According to Öncü, while these representations covertly and anxiously recognize the impossibility of allocating *taşra* an exteriority—in the sense that it could no longer be reduced to a specific social or economic class or a specific location but has permeated into every facet of society—there are still some sustained ways in which it is imagined. Figures of *taşra*, which include middle- or

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<sup>10</sup> I read Öncü’s article to be largely signalling at *taşra* while discussing otherness, although she herself does not name it as such.

underclass migrants *and* new elites, are fundamentally construed in some relation to elitist and rigidly defined notions of authenticity/purity and inauthenticity/impurity. For instance, middle-class migrants are perceived as having lost their presumed “traditional [*taşra*] innocence, purity and authenticity” as they adopt a “vulgar, mercantilist greediness” in the city (Öncü, 2000: 128, my translation). Similarly the new elite, consistently framed in states of parvenuism, are depicted to be shamelessly insatiable. They use and abuse religiosity for their own interests; and hence they cannot be even the genuine Muslims they claim to be. The underclass migrants, particularly men, are represented as dangerous, sexually-driven “yahoos” who “contaminate the environment they enter” (Öncü, 2000: 136, my translation). The common denominator that is thought to bring together all these and other diverse manifestations of *taşra* is the “grotesque,” “kitschy cultural melange,” “a polluted and contaminated culture of hybridization” that they have come to produce and sustain in the center (Öncü, 2000: 128; 1997: 69).

However, I detect one of the most illustrative ways in which *taşra* has come to be defined post-1980s in the term “maganda” that Öncü brings up in her article. Connoting a wretched form of existence that combines ideas of savagery, obscenity, and filthiness all at once, “maganda,” as Öncü (2000) tells us, was coined by cartoonists in the 1990s as a slang word and quickly appropriated into daily use by the public. In an almost manifesto-like passage that Öncü quotes from the widely-read, national daily newspaper *Hürriyet* “maganda” is described by a group of cartoonists as:

[...] an assault on emotions, they are an aesthetic aberration. They correspond to ignorance, to vulgarity, to nouveau riche, to pretension. They are the freakish

response to all the lost and disrupted values. We created them. They are the animal within us. They are potential danger. They are a health hazard. They are the AIDS virus. We allowed them to grow. They are a stain that is ineradicable. They are like plastic bottles—nondegradable and imperishable.

Maganda can be from any gender, race or class. They are contagious, they infect. They kill; make life miserable; cause allergies. Maganda is (unfortunately) universal (2000: 136, my translation).

As disturbing as it is in its explicit use of xenophobic terminology and metaphors, this passage contains some inconsistency with regards to the way it sets up and manages “maganda” as otherness. On the one hand, it speaks of “maganda” as an indelible otherness within. It cannot be assimilated or destroyed (i.e., “nondegradable” and “imperishable”). It cannot be neatly segregated and shut away—not because it simply *is* within but because there is no outside proper to which one might consign it. “Maganda” (or *taşra*, which this term implies and circles around) is everywhere, it “infects” everything; it can be embodied by anyone. The passage also implies that this otherness is created by the very interiority that it has now come to disturb. How is this otherness, then, to be controlled if it cannot be contained or assimilated? This is where the inconsistency in the text emerges, as the authors shift to talking about this otherness as if it came from the outside—like a virus or parasite.<sup>11</sup> It is precisely this inconsistency that reveals the paradoxical logic of internal exclusion. While this logic has to include

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<sup>11</sup> As Royle points out, Derrida talks of the supplement as if it were a virus. He writes of the “*virulence* of the concept,” which makes the supplement “impossible to arrest,” “to domesticate” or “to tame” (2003: 50).

otherness, it should also at the same time always contain within it the possibility and conditions of imminent exclusion. In post-1980s Turkey, then, the blurred distance between *taşra* and center has come to be negotiated predominantly through such a logic of internal exclusion. The center has in a way become obliged to accept and “tolerate” *taşra* but only by reserving to itself the right to revoke this inclusion as it sees fit.

In this regard, the increasing malleability of the borders between *taşra* and center in post-1980s Turkey does not generate a more just or equitable system of inclusion compared to that of the modernization project. Indeed, as I tried to explicate, the conditions of “partial” inclusion in this period are extremely precarious and no less discriminatory or brutal than conditions of exclusion. I will return to the elaboration of this point in my discussion of Ceylan’s *Three Monkeys* in Chapter Four.

Now, however, I want to turn my attention to Orhan Pamuk’s *Istanbul: Memories and the City* in order to expand on the insights of the theoretical frameworks presented in this chapter. Particularly, I want to consider how this text invokes *taşra* to explore and complicate the belatedness problematic and its psychic effects on national identity-formation.

## CHAPTER II

### TAŞRA, BELATEDNESS AND MELANCHOLY

#### IN ORHAN PAMUK'S *ISTANBUL*

*[In a literary work,] answers that are derived from the rules and regulations of the real world will drag us into “sociology”: something that a down-to-earth author would hate to do.*

(Orhan Pamuk, *Cumhuriyet*, 1990, my translation)

*[None of the Turkish novelists, from whom I learned a lot, such as Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Kemal Tahir, Yusuf Atılgan, Oğuz Atay,] ever attempted to shoot back literary answers to the political issues of their time. They never fell into such imprudence and lack of foresight.*

(Orhan Pamuk, *Varlık*, 1995, my translation)

*I wrote for beauty. And while entire generations of Turkish writers were modeling their work on John Steinbeck or Maxim Gorky—and destroying the essence of their talent by allowing it to serve something that supposedly transcended them all—I was reading Nabokov and dreaming on. Twenty-five years have passed, and I know now that if I had made the mistake of writing political novels, I would have been destroyed; the system would have annihilated me.*

(Orhan Pamuk, *Columbia Magazine*, 2007)

On numerous occasions in his literary career, Orhan Pamuk has highlighted that he does not want to engage with politics directly in his novels. His primary aim as a novelist, he maintained, is to write a “beautiful novel.” Whether Pamuk is a politically-engaged author or not has indeed been an ongoing debate in Turkey where a tradition that perceives the novel—and literature more generally—as a means to guide, educate, and mobilize the people along the lines of dominant ideologies has been an influential one in the history of modern Turkish literature. Pamuk’s repeated claims on the issue cannot be understood independent of this tradition, from which Pamuk has strived to distance his

work. I want to start this chapter by describing this tradition in some detail and placing Pamuk's work within it. For though the text on which I focus is a memoir rather than a novel, it partakes of the particular kind of "anti-political" aesthetic guiding Pamuk's fictional works. My larger argument is that this hostility to the political allows me to conceptualize a different kind of political engagement (different, that is, from the overtly or didactically political *and* from Pamuk's own understanding of the term)—one within which I propose to analyze the exploration of *taşra*, the project of modernization, and the relation of both to loss and grief in *Istanbul: Memories and the City*.

The first novels in Western style, which appeared during the *Tanzimat* (Reformation) period of the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, dealt in a very straightforward fashion with the ills and benefits of modernization and Westernization, the transformations of social and cultural life that these processes entailed, and the tense power dynamics between "the East" and "the West." These novels, written typically in a realist mode, contained undisguised and somewhat didactic articulations of social and political critique (Moran, 1983). Indeed, as literary critics Yıldız Ecevit (2004) and Ahmet Evin (2006) both point out, the realist novel was adopted from the West as part of the westernization/ modernization process. In this context, it was considered to be a literary form that is befitting of a modern and civilized culture. Realism was not only embraced as the dominant style of novel-writing but was also attributed a higher artistic and moralistic value than fantastic folk tales or romantic novels, for instance.

The dominant tendency to favour realist novels over other styles of creative writing intensified in the Republican era where the modernization/westernization process



involved more radical and immediate reforms. The preference for realist artistic products makes particular sense in this context, since such preference signals congruency with some of the foundational principles of the Enlightenment such as rationality, determinism and positivism, that the modernizing elite in the republican period cherished and religiously followed as building blocks of a modern society (Ecevit, 2004). As Ecevit notes, literary figures in this era, the majority of whom were supporters of the new regime and the reforms, also regarded realist style as “a necessary component of westernization” in the field of literature and the arts (2004: 29, my translation).

Starting from the 1910s and increasingly after the establishment of the Republic in 1923, novelists were represented and represented themselves as enlightened educators and mentors (Türkeş, 2005). They were not simply fiction writers, but frequently inserted comments in their novels as if they were anthropologists, sociologists or social psychologists, analyzing the pressing social issues of the time such as poverty, identity, “excessive westernization” and authenticity, secularization and religious investments, reactionism and traditionalism.

In the 1950s, the focus on questions and effects of modernization and westernization broadened from their cultural and social aspects to include economic ones as well. The “village novel,” or the “Anatolian novel,” emerged as a new genre partly as a response to the new conditions brought on by the intensification of industrialization that started to gradually break down rural economies and ways of living (Evin, 2006; Moran, 1990). These novels centered mainly on class antagonisms, feudal and capitalist exploitation, internal and/or seasonal migration. Characteristically, they told the stories of

the plight of the underclass who were exploited by landowners in the village and capitalist factory owners in the city. Written in what is referred to as “social realist” style, some of these novels also contained pointed criticisms of the state and government(s), drawing attention to their incompetence in responding to the needs and demands of exploited classes who made up the majority of the population. Although in terms of content, the social realist novels diverged from the themes of earlier novels and questioned, to a certain extent, official and dominant narratives on development and modernization, stylistically and in terms of the pedagogical role they attributed to the novelist and novel-writing in general, they remained loyal to the conventional understanding.

When literature is perceived as an educational tool, as a subsidiary to political processes through which existing social, cultural, economic problems are attempted to be resolved, aesthetic concerns are usually forced to take the back seat. As Ecevit (2004) and Evin (2006) maintain, up until the 1970s, experimentations in style and form that diverted from realism were not esteemed by mainstream critics nor readers. Novels that did not engage directly and realistically with existing social, political, cultural issues were treated as second-rate literature. As such, these experimental works remained marginal (Moran, 1994).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In this context, also see Erdağ Göknağ’s (2008) article “The Novel in Turkish: Narrative Tradition to Nobel Prize” which surveys Turkish literature from the mid-19th century to the present. Göknağ periodizes the Turkish narrative tradition of the last 125 years under seven epochs and highlights dominant worldviews and cultural trends as well as significant political and social changes that influenced literary production in each period.

Within this framework, we can now interpret Pamuk's unwavering position about the apolitical nature of his work—which he sometimes articulated rather provocatively<sup>13</sup>—as a gesture to detach his work, to a certain extent, from one dominant tradition of (social) realist novel-writing that perceives the novel as a pedagogical and ideological tool and the novelist as some sort of a beacon. As a matter of fact, one can perhaps even infer that Pamuk's work as a whole constitutes a critical encounter with this very narrowly and rigidly defined social realist tradition not only in its literary and aesthetic manifestations, but also in its social and political symptoms. As Ecevit (2004) states, in a society where literature, and indeed any form of creative practice, is produced first and foremost as an exercise in the formation of some political consciousness and where novelists are presumed to be enlightened educators who are, categorically, supposed to know more and better than the general populace and who are expected to offer their insight into the solutions of existing social, political and cultural problems, Orhan Pamuk's refusal to perform this role created as much antagonism as anxiety. His critics in Turkey referred to him as a formalist, and his novels were deemed incoherent, difficult to follow, boring, unoriginal and without depth. He was even denounced as a “paparazzi-style novelist” and an intellectual fraud by some Kemalist/nationalist commentators. Pamuk's domestic and international success has been explained as just another contingent, ephemeral fad that culture industries produce if not linked to his family's

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<sup>13</sup> In one interview, Pamuk even declared that he is “an author who lives in the Ivory Tower” to resist political appropriations of his work. His remarks have of course created a controversy and he was subsequently attacked as an elitist, a pseudo-intellectual who is indifferent to the realities of his society (Pamuk qtd. in Ecevit, 2004: 239, my translation).

financial and cultural capital, which is speculated to have provided him access to the media and to influential figures and institutions in literary circles.

In recounting such criticisms and attacks I do not intend to subsequently try and debunk them so as to defend and exonerate Pamuk and his work. Rather, I want to entertain the idea that there is a significant connection between the chronic efforts to discredit Pamuk's work and Pamuk's literary endeavours to break away from the social realist tradition. Indeed, I want to further suggest that this is precisely the site where, despite his self-identifying as being apolitical, Pamuk's work becomes political. To elaborate, I seek to argue that it is precisely because Orhan Pamuk's literary work touches on certain sore spots in the hegemonic national imaginary in Turkey that intolerant and belligerent comments against Pamuk have become rather commonplace, particularly in the last 5 years, in mainstream media, amongst Kemalist bureaucratic elite as well as in those segments of the civil society that align themselves with Kemalism, Kemalist nationalism and ultra nationalism.

The escalation of the "Orhan Pamuk debate" in Turkey was certainly contingent upon a series of recent events. In 2005 when Pamuk stated in an interview with the Swiss newspaper *Tages Anzeiger* that "thirty thousand Kurds have been killed here, and a million Armenians. And almost nobody dares to speak but me," he was prosecuted under the infamous Article 301 of the Turkish penal code six months after his return to the country (qtd. in Matossian, 2005).<sup>14</sup> Although Pamuk was acquitted, he was in a way

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<sup>14</sup> Article 301 makes punishable by imprisonment up to three years any public declaration that "denigrates the Turkish nation, the Republic of Turkey, or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey." Given the apparent vagueness and broad scope of what can be considered as "denigration" under this article, over

forced into a voluntary exile because of continuous death threats.<sup>15</sup> Shortly after Pamuk's court case, his nomination for the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature was announced. The announcement was received largely in dismay in Turkey where some columnists, critics and even some of the representatives of the government and the state described the Nobel Academy's nomination as a "political move" designed to celebrate an author who "hangs out the national laundry" in inappropriate places (Hansen, 2009). The nomination was depicted as a scheme to shame Turkey on the international arena. It was even argued that this was a calculated attempt to put in distress the ongoing membership negotiations with the European Union. When Pamuk received the prize in 2006, the frustration and disappointment deepened to such an extent that the Turkish president at the time, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, refused to congratulate Pamuk publicly.

I would argue that, during this process, the already existing scepticism about Pamuk's literary inclinations got tagged onto the annoyance felt towards his personal political choices. The criticism of his work was conflated with the criticism of his political position. The former was used as a means to support and verify the latter and vice versa. Yet, most of these criticisms that appeared in mainstream media remained on a superficial level and lacked (perhaps even refused) serious engagement with Pamuk's

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100 people, mostly authors, journalists, publishers, scholars, human rights activists and intellectuals have so far been prosecuted. Charges were pressed predominantly against those who have taken oppositional and critical positions against the official, nationalist metanarratives around the Kurdish issue and the Armenian Genocide. In this sense, it is clear that the Article was drafted as an attempt by the State, the military and the judicio-bureaucratic elite to contain, intimidate and censor political dissent through the use of arbitrary power. Although most of the cases were either dismissed or resulted in acquittal, about a dozen people were convicted. Among these convicted was Hrant Dink, a prolific journalist, editor, thinker and a citizen of Turkey with Armenian descent, who shortly after his conviction was assassinated in 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Despite an earlier acquittal in criminal court, in 2009 the Supreme Court of Appeals' General Law Council overturned the lower court's decision and in March 2011 Pamuk was sentenced to pay 6000 YTL. in compensation to six plaintiffs who claimed that their personal rights have been attacked by Pamuk's statements to the Swiss newspaper. Pamuk still retains his rights to appeal the decision.

work. This whole debate was also a rather curious exercise since in his novels, Pamuk tries to steer clear of any obvious support for or disapproval of any particular political position. As a matter of fact, I read this as a significant gesture he makes towards unplugging from the dominant social-realist tradition. Pamuk's questioning of the Turkish novel's political vocation resides in a refusal of stable political "sides." Rather than blatantly choosing one position or the other, in my reading, Pamuk's works try to make sense of or simply reveal the contradictions, ambivalences or ambiguities that dwell in any position that try to constitute itself in terms of certainty, totality, and coherence. In this sense, Pamuk's work is reflective of a significant rupture in the tradition of novel-writing in Turkey.<sup>16</sup> Whether it is the early novels of the 1900s or the village novels of post-1950s, binary structures such as East/West, civilized/primitive, modern/traditional, oppressor/ oppressed, city/village, victim/rebel, innocence/immorality seem to frame the organization and development of the narratives. In her eloquently articulated paper on Orhan Pamuk and the literary canon in Turkey, literary scholar and critic Jale Parla also calls attention to this point which demarcates Pamuk's work from the earlier tradition:

Since its emergence, our novel has been a novel of black and white. As our novelists write about black, that is about death, evil, betrayal, they know about

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<sup>16</sup> I am not claiming that Pamuk is the one and only representative of this trend in Turkish literature. As Moran (1993) and Evin (2006) indicate there was a palpable shift in the post-1980 novel in Turkey in terms of both content and style. The economic and socio-cultural transformation ensuing the 1980 military coup, which prompted a period of coercion and liberalization at the same time, also produced a new vision in literature. Along with the effects of the postmodern turn on literary production, this new vision culminated in a diversion from social realism and a focus on the individual. There also emerged an interest in narrative experimentation that included nonlinear storylines, inconsistent character developments, erasure of the omniscient narrator, intertextuality and self-reflexivity. Authors such as Latife Tekin, Bilge Karasu, Nazlı Eray, Buket Uzuner, Pınar Kür, Murathan Mungan, İhsan Oktay Anar, Elif Şafak are amongst the representatives of this new movement in novel-writing. Also see Gökner (2008: 496-503) for a more comprehensive list of authors and description of major literary themes and trends in this period.

white; and they let us know that they know through various narrative strategies.

Even though they take us through the darkest tunnels, we know that the torch that will illuminate the tunnel is in their hands. In Orhan Pamuk's narratives, however, there is no such thing. There, the colors are pale; they are the colors of dusk (2006: 41, my translation).

Hence, epistemologically speaking, the public debate that took place on a very literalist and monochromatic reading of Pamuk's work seems to me to have either missed its crux or avoided a serious encounter with it because that could have led to the opening of Pandora's box. Within this framework, I locate in this debate not only some antagonism towards Pamuk himself, but also a fervent intolerance of ambivalence, ambiguity and uncertainty. The intolerance is towards what Pamuk has come to embody, namely all those critical interventions that reveal not only the workings but, perhaps more significantly, the failures, ambivalences and internal contradictions of the Kemalist project of modernity and the nationalist ideology it is enveloped in.

In what follows, I offer a reading of Pamuk's, *Istanbul: Memories and The City* (2005 [2003]) which disputes both the mainstream critics' and Pamuk's own rendering of the political meanings of this text. I chart the political significance of *Istanbul* along two intersecting lines. One pertains to the dissertation's overarching theme of *taşra*—which, as the discussions in the previous chapter reveal, is a deeply marked concept in the culturo-political topography of Turkey—and involves exploring its expanded meanings in the work under consideration here. Bringing together this very urban text on Istanbul with the concept of *taşra* may seem strange at first sight since in its received articulations

*taşra* connotes the opposite of the urban. However, one compelling and politically-charged feature of this book, I argue, is the ways in which it undermines the dichotomous imaginations of urban/provincial by inserting *taşra* into the heart of the city as an affective dimension. Still, the political gesture performed by the text is not just limited to the blurring of the boundaries between city and *taşra*, inside and outside, self and other (which is characteristic of all Pamuk's works). It is also couched in the linking of the affective geography of *taşra* to the experience and dilemmas of postcoloniality or "belated modernity." To put it more precisely, *Istanbul* is revelatory in its treatment of *taşra* in two ways. First, it invokes *taşra* as a metaphorical site of an internal/national splitting (between the authentic and the inauthentic, native and foreign, traditional and modern, "Eastern" and "Western," the urban and the provincial, the past and the present/future) wrought by Turkey's ambivalent encounter with a western model of modernization. Second, it alludes to *taşra* as the terrain of "belatedness," "peripherality," "provinciality," and "third-worldliness" that Turkey occupies on the global level in the Eurocentric understandings of modernity. This expanded articulation names *taşra* no longer simply as an actual locale, but a mode of existence that can be experienced even at the center of a buzzing metropolis. From within such an interpretive framework, *taşra* in this work appears as a motif with a rich connotative field that musters experiences of loss, sorrow, inadequacy, resentment, disappointment, stuckness and suspension, which I examine under the category of melancholic grief.

This brings me to the second line along which I examine the political significance of Pamuk's text. My conceptualization of *taşra* in this chapter rests mainly on its



association with melancholy and as such I approach the text essentially as a poignant narrative of grief that takes the idea of loss and the gruelling processes of coming to terms with it (or not being able to do so) as its central concern. Through an engagement with the recent theoretical debates on mourning and melancholia, I analyze the varying and conflicting forms of melancholic response to loss that the text embodies and deliberate on the political implications of these forms. In revealing how in Pamuk's narrative melancholy emerges as something that both "[blocks] the unfolding of [the subject's] potential in the present" through a fixation on loss *and* provides a potentiating force of creativity and transformation, I infer that *Istanbul* complicates the assumptions of both of the two main theoretical positions regarding mourning and melancholia (Ruti 2005: 650). In its detailed and powerful depiction of the dark and grim aspects of melancholy, this narrative does not easily yield itself for a reading that promotes melancholy as the properly ethical manner of relating to loss. Yet, in its capacity to weave into the story of melancholic grief enabling and creative ways of dealing with loss, it also frustrates a reading that approaches melancholy as a pathology, as a "regressive" and paralytic form of grieving that needs to be rehabilitated and transformed into the empowering labours of mourning. As a matter of fact, what makes *Istanbul* a sophisticated and compelling example of elegiac literature is the way it demonstrates, and impels us to reflect upon, the complexities of grieving—in all its confusions and turmoil, tensions and ambivalence—some of which remain too hazy and perhaps even impenetrable to other forms of knowledge. *Istanbul's* intimation of *taşra* as an affective state intimately bound up with melancholy offers us an other way of "knowing" Turkey.

Put differently, *taşra*/melancholy becomes an analytic to probe into the belatedness problematic. It is in this particular sense, too, that this text is deeply political because as a specific regime of articulation, as literary expression, it reveals what remains hidden or obscure in theory. In other words, it is “as literature” that *Istanbul* introduces a disturbance into the established systems of meaning and “intervenes in [the] carving up of space and time, the visible and invisible, speech and noise” (Rancière, 2004: 63; 2011: 4).<sup>17</sup>

## **II. 1. Mourning and Melancholic Grieving: A Theoretical Discussion**

Two main contesting positions seem to have emerged in the debates around mourning and melancholia, which draw largely from psychoanalytical theory. The longer-standing position institutes mourning as the desirable, politically progressive and emancipatory mode of relating to loss, where arduous labours of working-through are taken on. This process entails a slow recollection of memories that bound the mourning subject to the lost object. This highly paradoxical and repetitious memory-work allows the subject to “hypercathect” the memories that bind him/her to the lost object and hence bring the object to consciousness in all the different ways it has been registered. Simultaneously, though, in each act of remembering the grieving subject also slowly starts to withdraw (“decathect”) his/her libidinal attachments from the lost object.

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<sup>17</sup> My understanding of the political draws largely from the work of Jacques Rancière who articulates the political as that which introduces a rupture into the governing symbolic order that functions as the “implicit law” organizing and regulating what can or cannot be said, seen, heard, thought, or done (2004: 63, 85). In this regard, Rancière defines political activity as something that “makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only a place for noise” (1999: 29-30).

Through this process, the subject recognizes that a substantial loss took place that has effectuated a change in the ways in which s/he constituted him/herself. The psychic labours of working-through impel the grieving subject to establish a distance from the lost object, which in turn enables him/her to acknowledge the separateness, the difference, of the lost object. Indeed, the loss has been consequential in the sense that it requires the subject to revise and alter the previous narratives of him/herself, but the possibility of such alteration becomes viable only with the acknowledgment that the lost love object was a separate entity. In this sense, “mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation (perhaps one should say *submitting* to a transformation) the full result of which one cannot know in advance” (Butler: 2004: 21).

In contradistinction to mourning in which the bereaved subject comes to “convert haunting presences into honored dead” and finds a way to make loss a part of his/her life, in melancholia the subject develops a fixation on loss (LaCapra, 1998: 204). The subject cannot “get over” the loss mostly because the lost love object had been “drawn into the field of [...] narcissism” (Leader, 2008: 135, Santner, 1990). That is to say, the subject is unable to distinguish between the lost object and his/her own ego. This is also why s/he resists relinquishing the lost object, since this would also mean losing one’s self. In this regard, Santner argues that in melancholy the fundamental resistance is actually not so much to the letting go of a particular lost love object, but to the letting go of a “fantasy of omnipotence”:

The melancholic grieves not so much for the loss of the other as for the fact of otherness and all that that entails. Melancholy [...] is the rehearsal of the shattering

of fragmentation of one's primitive narcissism, an event that predates the capacity to feel any real mourning for a lost object, since for the narcissist other objects do not really exist (1990: 3).

Unable to acknowledge the boundaries between "'I' and 'thou,' 'here' and 'there,' 'now' and 'then'" in the process of grieving, the melancholic is stuck in a mourning without end (Santner, 1990: 6). S/he is absorbed in loss, regenerating and reliving the pain and angst of loss with a sense of perpetual immediacy. In the absence of flexibility and tolerance towards reorganization and reconfiguration of the self in response to loss, a sense of helplessness and paralysis pervades. The melancholic is "locked in compulsive repetition, possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object" (LaCapra, 1999: 713).

Within this framework, the position that finds in mourning politically-potentiating grieving practices emphasizes its proclivity to transformation and receptivity to difference and otherness (Moglen, 2007). In particular, the memory-work involved in mourning, which facilitates accessing loss from different angles and registering it in its various representations, is conceived as a work of interpretation where unconscious resistance and ambivalence around the lost object are worked-through or worked-out (Leader, 2008; Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973). On a collective level, these practices are deemed critical to "[invent] a society that remembers, rather than unconsciously repeats" the injuries that lie at its heart (Forter, 2003: 135).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Labours of mourning also help disengaging from a politics of victimhood and resentment that are constructed upon a fetishistic attachment to past injury and loss. Drawing on Nietzsche, Brown (1995) elaborates on the politics of *ressentiment* in the context of contemporary identity politics which she

The other dominant position in the scholarly debates around mourning and melancholia undertakes a work of de-pathologizing melancholia. Resisting a generalized, categorical disparagement of melancholia, it tries to make visible its critical, creative and unpredictable political aspects (Eng and Kazanjian, 2002). Drawing mostly from Benjamin, scholars who focus on melancholia as a productive affect claim that a sustained dwelling on loss need not signify only and simply a narcissistic engagement with the past. Instead, it can indicate a way of keeping an “active and open relationship with history” (Eng and Kazanjian, 2002: 1). As a mode of “intensified reflection” on loss and ruins, melancholy in the Benjaminian sense, rather than being fixated on loss and the past, maintains a productive tension between the past and the present. Although a profound sadness proceeds from recognizing the irreversibility of the past and what is lost, the melancholic is at the same time “exceedingly aware of, angry about, and interested in the losses one has suffered” (Flatley, 2008: 6). Besides being simply

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associates with a resistance to letting go of past marginalization, subordination or exclusion. According to Brown, because in identity politics past experiences of injury and loss are construed as defining constituents of present identity and as the ultimate basis upon which various political demands are made, the conditions of such exclusion, quite paradoxically, need to be perpetually reproduced and reaffirmed rather than surmounted or transformed. This is needed in order to continue to make political claims and, above all, to constitute identity and demand its recognition. Consequently, this obsessive investment in past suffering inhibits processes of healing in a rather “perverted” manner. As she further explains, in the particular relation the subject of *ressentiment* formulates with the past s/he constitutes him/herself as “stricken by history. [S/he] cannot ‘will backwards,’ [...] cannot exert power over the past—either as a specific set of events or as time itself” (Brown, 1995: 72). This creates frustration, anger and resentment which, in the face of claimed powerlessness, are then displaced upon “sites of blame,” scapegoats who are figured to be responsible for the “subject’s powerlessness over its past” (74). Brown suggests that this cycle is bound to be repeated until the subject agrees to a giving up of the “wounded attachment” to the past which defines present identity: “[The] past cannot be redeemed *unless* the identity ceases to be invested in it, and it cannot cease to be invested in it without giving up its identity as such, thus giving up its economy of avenging and at the same time perpetuating its hurt” (73). I read Brown to be saying that the interruption of this cycle of insistent pain and resentment necessitates a loosening of the narcissistic identification with loss when she talks about “learning to speak and read ‘I am’ [...] as potentially in motion, as temporal, as not-I, as deconstructable according to a genealogy of want rather than as fixed interests or experiences” (75).

depressed, the melancholic is also highly dissatisfied with the current state of affairs. Such dissatisfaction, in turn, can lead to a search “for fresh air, for an opening that would break the unbearable constraint” (Žižek, 2000a: 88). Within this framework, “melancholy proper” for Žižek, who defines it once again with reference to Benjamin, “designates the attitude of those who, although still in a closed universe, already possess a vague premonition of another dimension which is just out of their reach” (2000a: 88). As Pensky elaborates in his analysis of Benjamin’s “melancholy dialectics” (“a dialectic of loss and recovery”), dissatisfaction and a ubiquitous sense that something substantial is missing—or, the constant awareness that harmony and completion are absent—can become “forces that drive the contemplative mind onward” and incite the imagination of a different, transformed world (1993: 17, 28; Flatley, 2008).<sup>19</sup> It is in this particular sense that Benjamin who, despite being resolutely critical of a cynical, paralytic form of melancholia, still identified a “revolutionary kernel” within it (Flatley, 2008: 74; Pensky, 1993).

Apart from drawing attention to this latent potential in melancholia à la Benjamin, scholars from different disciplines have also forged poignant criticisms of Freud’s conceptualization of mourning. In their reading of Freud, Eng and Kazanjian (2002) for instance, associate mourning with a process at the end of which the past ultimately gets resolved and is declared dead. Melancholia, for them, signifies a “sustained form of mourning” where instead of “abandoning,” forgetting or finding substitutes for the lost

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<sup>19</sup> This is precisely why Žižek claims that “melancholy is the beginning of philosophy” because it indicates a state of mind which is “[disappointed] at all positive, observable objects none of which can satisfy our desire” (2000b: 662).

object, the melancholic remains committed to it in his/her refusal to let go (4). For Eng and Kazanjian, such form of grieving indicate “an adamant refusal of closure” which implies a “continued and open relation to the past,” enabling one not only to incorporate loss into present identity but also to configure new and shifting understandings of the past and losses (3-4). In a similar vein, Ruti (2005) argues that unlike mourning, melancholia “hold[s] the past open and unresolved” and as such it “facilitates a different type of rewriting [the past]—one that does not seek to surmount but merely to revisit and reassess the past since melancholia [...] retains the past as an active ingredient of the present” (646). Likewise, deliberating on the collective effects of melancholic grieving in his exploration of specific postcolonial literary texts as narratives of “interminable mourning,” Durrant argues:

For the individual mourning [seems] to be a process of learning how to bury the dead, how to attain [...] ‘symbolic closure.’ For the collective [...] the possibility of a just future lies in our ability [...] to conjure the dead rather than bury them. [...] At the level of the individual, the melancholic’s refusal to recognize an end to the time of mourning seems to preclude the possibility of the future. For the collective, the commitment never to forget seems precisely to be a way of looking to the future, a way of ensuring that history does not repeat itself (2004: 8-9).<sup>20</sup>

I present these re-conceptualizations of melancholia not to suggest that those who favour mourning on account of its political implications have uncritically embraced Freud’s

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<sup>20</sup> Durrant’s astute analysis draws from a Derridean understanding of mourning. Derrida’s notion of “interminable” or “inconsolable” mourning refuses the distinction between mourning and melancholia. See Derrida, 2001; especially the section entitled “By Force of Mourning,” 142-164.

model of mourning and melancholia. In fact, there are a significant number of scholars who put forward sophisticated reinterpretations of Freud's influential essay that complicate the dichotomous rigidity of his model at the same time as they dissociate mourning from a notion of abandonment and forgetting of the past and/or the lost object (Forster, 2003; LaCapra, 1998, 1999; Moglen, 2007; Ricciardi, 2003; Santner, 1990). In this sense, it is somewhat puzzling that advocates of melancholic grieving have engaged little if at all with these more nuanced articulations of mourning and continue to point at Freud's essay as the locus of their criticism. Having said that, the positions which espouse mourning have also not adequately dealt with the more creative and potentiating aspects of melancholy. Regardless of their recognition of complexities of grieving and mindfulness of Freud's normativization of mourning, they seem to be bound to the idea that, ultimately, melancholy is something to be rehabilitated and surmounted. At best, it is conceived to be an "intermediary" or "transitional" step which may be necessary to move on to the labours of mourning (LaCapra, 1999). Such a conceptualization implicitly pre-installs the primacy of mourning over melancholia, elevating the former to the status of a "proper," universal norm. Mourning then gets easily attached to moralizing discourses which can be imposing if not patronizing in the way they dismiss and try to convert diverse forms in which people experience and process their losses.

In the context of this theoretically intricate and apparently irreconcilable debate, I find Darian Leader's (2008) particular conceptualization of melancholy perspective-shifting. For Leader recognizes the debilitating effects of melancholia at the same time as he accommodates the critiques raised against mourning. Leader's main point is that



melancholy constitutes a structurally different psychic mechanism than mourning. That is to say, it does not designate a failed, arrested or blocked form of mourning, but entails a separate psychic category of its own. This is an intriguing theory because on the one hand it avoids the risk of falling into developmentalist theories of melancholy and mourning which follow from the presumption that mourning is *the goal* to be achieved, *the ideal* way of grieving, by insisting on the inconvertibility of melancholia into mourning. On the other hand, in doing this, it does not promote a view of melancholy as an insurmountable experience of grief where the subject gets trapped in a debilitating cycle of repetition. It makes space for a remedy that entails not the transformation of melancholia into mourning but one that emerges out of the very workings of melancholia.

Leader's main claim is that that unlike the mourner—who succeeds in “killing the dead a second time” through symbolization and hence once again becomes able to make investments in new objects—the melancholic continues to live with the dead or dies an “artificial death” as s/he withdraws from the midst of life (Leader, 2008: 116-17; Santner, 2001). The melancholic's inability to let go of the lost object stems from a particular psychic structure in which the subject conflates the lost object with “the *place* it has occupied for us,” the place from which we constitute an image of ourselves as recognized and loved by the Other (Leader, 2008: 131-32). Because the loved object is not separated from the place it occupies, once it is lost the subject is faced with a horrifying, “unbearable hole which threatens to engulf [him] at all times.” This hole, this lack, cannot be filled with any other object because “[the lost object] has become completely identified with it” (193). That is to say, in melancholy loss is experienced as lack: “the

lost loved [object] becomes a hole, an ever-present void which the melancholic cannot give up his attachment to” (199). Although grieving for particular losses may occasion situations where one is exposed to the structural dimension of lack that is constitutive of subjectivity, for the melancholic the distinction between lack and loss is missing from the get-go. This is also what lies behind the melancholic’s refusal to forgo the lost object since, even though empirically dead or gone, it still provides him/her with a fundamental reference point to “situate himself in relation to the Other” (186). The attachment to this lost object cannot be withdrawn, because this would effectively mean a degradation if not a disintegration of one’s sense of selfhood as well as the collapse of symbolic reality. As Leader cogently puts it, “the dead cannot be relinquished because without them one would be left at the mercy of something even more terrible [and reduced to the state of] a pure object open to every attack of an unloving and hostile world” (186). In this regard, in melancholy losing loss effectively amounts to losing all.<sup>21</sup>

The refusal to let go of the loss is what confines the melancholic in a suspended space and temporality, in a limbo, between the past and the present, between the world of the living and the world of the dead. It is as if the melancholic subject *dies* with the lost loved object in the sense that s/he “disappears from life” even though biologically still

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<sup>21</sup> It is, I think, in this precise sense that Žižek conceptualizes melancholy “not simply [as] the attachment to the lost object but [as] *the attachment to the very original gesture of its loss*” (2000b: 660, my emphasis). Similar to Leader’s assertions, Žižek also posits that one primary characteristic of melancholy is the confusion of loss with lack, that is the conflation of particular, historical loss with a structural one: “melancholy interprets lack as a loss. [...] this deceitful translation of lack into loss enables us to assert our possession of the object [...] so the melancholic, in his unconditional fixation on the lost object, in a way possesses it in its very loss” (660). This is, indeed, a fundamental paradox of melancholic grieving – preserving and possessing the lost loved object is possible insofar as it remains lost. The fantasy of full possession of the object, its integration into the self can still be sustained even after the object is gone/lost through an obsessive, fetishizing attachment to its loss. For if the object is now lost, one can claim that it was once theirs to have.

alive (Leader, 2008: 179). As Leader elaborates: “the ‘real world’ inhabited by the melancholic involves such terrifying motifs as endless purgatory, minutes that last centuries, unutterable pain and angst and the call of the dead” (181). One of the most distressing and incapacitating aspects of melancholia has to do with this experience of being in the limbo where the melancholic subject feels not only trapped but also unable to *articulate* his/her state of being. In a split existence, the melancholic is caught “between two apparently contradictory realities [...] How can he describe where he is if he inhabits two places at once? From which place should he speak?” (187) According to Leader, this is indeed an ontological impasse, an impossible situation where language fails to express the experience of the melancholic’s very being. In this context, it is informative that Butler also comments on the particular speech of the melancholic as being “neither verdictive nor declarative (assertoric), but inevitably indirect and circuitous. What cannot be declared by the melancholic is nevertheless what governs melancholic speech—an unspeakability that organizes the field of the speakable” (1997: 186).<sup>22</sup>

Such conceptualization of melancholy generates a series of questions pertaining to the recuperation of the condition. If melancholy is characterized by an impossibility of representing/symbolizing loss, then are there ways in which such blockage can be removed? How could the cycle of suffering be interrupted in a manner that overcomes the paralyzing sense of suspension and stuckness between two contradictory realities to enable the refashioning of a “vitalized” existence and future? While this would involve

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<sup>22</sup> In a similar fashion, Kristeva (1989) describes melancholy in terms of a “devitalized existence” and “living death.” She expounds the melancholic’s experience of grief as “noncommunicable” and “inexorable” which she later on associates with being a witness to “the signifier’s flimsiness and the living being’s precariousness,” in other words, with being a witness to the ultimate failure of each and every representation (3-4; 20).

taking into consideration and working through the particular conditions that bear on the formation of melancholy—conditions that have to do with the subject, the lost object and the symbolic system that girds them—it also seems critical that attempts at amelioration should address in some way the fundamental difficulty around symbolization. But if melancholy involves a structural confusion of loss and lack that renders the subject unable to translate the experience of his/her being into words—what Leader (2008), following Freud, calls a blockage in the passage from “thing-presentations” to “word-presentations”—then does this leave the melancholic in an immutable situation?

Leader suggests that since melancholy is *not* a blocked, arrested or failed form of mourning but a structurally different category on its own, the healing process must follow a different path than that of the work of mourning. In other words, he suggests that the remedy lies not so much in the attempts to transform melancholy into mourning, but in “finding [ways] to designate [...] the impossibility of [the melancholic’s] own position inhabiting two worlds” (191). In more concrete terms this would mean discovering creative ways to express how words (or symbolization, in more general terms) fail instead of searching for the right words that correspond to and delineate the melancholic’s situation. Within this framework, what I ultimately argue is that in *Istanbul* Pamuk enacts melancholic speech in the very form of the text and does so in a way that reveals the creative vein in melancholy. First, however, we need to understand what melancholy actually means in *Istanbul*.

## II.2. Belatedness, Melancholy and the City as *Taşra*

Since the English translation of *Istanbul*, Pamuk's name has become inseparably attached to melancholy. The Swedish Academy's Nobel Prize statement praised Pamuk as an author "who in the quest for the melancholic soul of his native city has discovered new symbols for the clash and interlacing of cultures." The book was celebrated as a refined piece of elegiac literature in the West, as "an irresistibly seductive book" that "tells of an invisible melancholy" which "stems not from the ruins of a civilization but from the heartache that comes from living everyday amid those ruins" (Morris, 2005; de Bellaigue, 2005; Roy, 2005).

*Istanbul* is essentially a pseudo-autobiography that weaves together Pamuk's memories of his childhood and the city's multi-layered history. Accompanied by black-and-white pictures from the author's family archives and famous Armenian-Turkish photographer Ara Güler's signature shots of the city, Pamuk's narrative intertwines individual and collective history, aligning his family's dysfunctions and deteriorating wealth with what he sees as the city's gradual impoverishment and ruin following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In this sense, *Istanbul* is a narrative that tries to intimate what is lost or had to be given up both individually and collectively, in the process of modernization. Pertinently, the dominant affective tones of the text are those of longing, sadness, disappointment, frustration, and self-reproach. As a matter of fact "*hüzün*," which Pamuk considerably elaborates upon as a collective sense of melancholy and longing and as an intentional withdrawal in the face of life, acts as the binding concept of this multifarious text (102-104). For Pamuk, *hüzün* defines the mood of the city and is

fostered by the “pain of destruction, loss and poverty” (102). It is not experienced only as an effect of loss, but is also a signifier of dignity—from the lens of *hüzün*, failure and poverty are not perceived as consequences of social, economic, historical forces; rather they are claimed as preordained facts of life that one carries with honour. In other words, in Pamuk’s articulation *hüzün* is inherently paradoxical. It implies both an “erosion of the will,” something that feeds into resignation and passivity, yet also a sense of boastful acceptance of failure, defeat and poverty as if these were consciously chosen. As he writes, “*hüzün* does not just paralyse the inhabitants of Istanbul; it also gives them poetic licence to be paralysed” (trans. Freely, 2005: 92-93).<sup>23</sup>

In the chapter devoted to the exploration of the meanings of *hüzün*, Pamuk draws from a diverse literature to formulate his thoughts. He first delves into Sufi mysticism and Islamic philosophy to elucidate the affirmative understanding of *hüzün*, which maintain that the feelings of inadequacy and lack that lie at its root are reputable feelings that signify a sense of spiritual depth. Suffering and feeling *hüzün* indicate an awareness that one can never be close enough to Allah. In this sense, it is rather the inability to feel *hüzün* that becomes problematic in a certain practice of Sufism. Pamuk later brings some Western articulations of melancholy into conversation with this particular Islamic tradition (i.e., Richard Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and the deliberations of the Romantics and the Decadents). Yet, none of these traditions seem to provide Pamuk with a satisfactory explanation to Istanbul’s particular *hüzün*. The real key, he claims, is the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the marks this has left on the landscapes, scenic

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<sup>23</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations used in this chapter from *Istanbul: Memories and the City* belong to the book’s translator Maureen Freely.

textures and colors of the city, as well as on the ways of living and being of its inhabitants. As Pamuk indicates early on in the book, Istanbul's *hüzün*/melancholy is bound up with the particular history and experience of modernization and westernization in Turkey:

[...] the melancholy of this dying culture [Ottoman] was all around us. Great as the desire to Westernize and modernize may have been, the more desperate wish, it seemed, was to be rid of all the bitter memories of the fallen empire: rather as a spurned lover throws away his lost beloved's clothes, possessions and photographs. But as nothing, Western or local came to fill the void, the great drive to Westernize amounted mostly to the erasure of the past; the effect on culture was reductive and stunting [...] That which I would later know as pervasive melancholy and mystery, I felt in childhood as boredom and gloom (27).

In this sense, *hüzün* for Pamuk designates a collective psychic response to the loss of the Ottoman Empire. However, as Almond suggests in a different context, in his analysis of postcolonial melancholy in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, this is "not a sadness at the demise of imperialism, but rather a sad perplexity at the cessation of one identity without a satisfactory, 'true' one being able to take its place" (2004: 98). It also indicates at least ambivalence towards, if not a disguised criticism of the "narrow, bullying hegemony of an artificially created nationalism" that, at its inception in Turkey, strived to sever the ties with the Ottoman past (Almond, 2004: 90).

To understand the sources and effects of this collective melancholy, it seems necessary here to consider at some length the particulars of the modernization process in

Turkey. A “severe shifting of models” took place with modernization/westernization which dates back to the *Tanzimat* (Reformation) period of the Ottoman Empire in the mid- nineteenth century (Koçak, 1996: 99, my translation). It was indeed both the threat of European colonization together and an urge to differentiate themselves from Europe’s other “others” that initially drove the Ottomans to modernize/Westernize (Berktaş, 2005). This was indeed a moment of significant shift in the arrangement of power relations when, as a waning Empire, the Ottomans “encountered [their] postcolonial condition,” as they “felt the ‘need’ to take the West seriously as a cultural ‘sparring partner’” and instituted Europe as an ideal to be followed in order to be able to cope with it (Kusno, 2006: 16). Such a shift involved a fundamental dislocation in the perception of the world as well as that of the self; it entailed a slide from a “self-confident isolation to an increasingly self-conscious concern for what others may have had to say about them [Ottomans]” (Eldem 2007: 217). This also meant an acceptance of the “superiority” of Europe and a subscription to its particular conceptualization of modernity. In this context, Koçak (1996) suggests that what was named as “westernization” virtually meant an admission of “belatedness,” the admission of a position of lag and deficiency vis-à-vis Europe.

Following the partition of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, the Independence War was waged against the Allies by the newly-formed National Movement under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal. Started as a resistance movement against the occupying powers, the National Movement also aimed at the abolition of the Ottoman Sultanate and Caliphate, creating in its stead a secular, republican state based on



national sovereignty. When the republic was established in 1923, the new regime undertook a series of reforms towards westernization/modernization. These reforms, although much more radical and intrusive in character, dovetailed with those that were commenced under the Ottoman rule. However, the republican modernizers strove hard to distance themselves and the new national identity from the Ottoman Empire which they associated with traditions, values and non-secular norms that were deemed intrinsically non-Western (Gülalp, 2003).<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, the republican modernizers, like their Ottoman predecessors, embraced a Eurocentric and Orientalist understanding of modernity, but they also emphatically defined being/becoming modern in terms of cutting ties with the Ottoman past. In championing what Stokes describes as a “resolutely forward-looking nationalist modernism,” the new leadership did not acknowledge the collective sense of grief occasioned by the loss of previous identitarian attachments and sudden removal of vital reference points (2000: 239-40). On the contrary, under the modernizing gaze, attachment to the Ottoman past—a past that was constructed largely in pejorative terms—signified an aberration if not a traitorous unwillingness to follow the progressionist ideals of

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<sup>24</sup> In the early years of the republic the reforms permeated into virtually every aspect of life including political administration, legislation, economy, education, dress codes, religion, sports, and arts. However, probably one of the most consequential and devastating in its effects was the alphabet and language reform which by banning the Ottoman alphabet and introducing the Latin alphabet in its place not only immediately and precipitously rendered large numbers of literate people illiterate but also brought about a radical rupture with the past. Although its effect on spoken language was not immediate, the reform made anything written before the 1930s incomprehensible for new generations. It basically turned Ottoman language, a combination of Turkish, Arabic and Persian which was much more nuanced and extensive in its vocabulary than the “new,” “purified” Turkish proposed by the modernizers, into a dead language by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, through the language reform, the Ottoman archive, Ottoman literature and historiography were rendered inaccessible to generations of ordinary citizens and relegated to the hands of experts, i.e., literary scholars, historians, linguists, etc. In this sense, the language reform epitomizes the desire of the modernizers to break away from the Ottoman past.

modernity. In its own Eurocentric and Orientalist account, Kemalist ideology defined the Ottoman past “in terms of a lack: the absence of technology, the absence of rationality, the absence of civil society, the absence of modernity” (Sayyid, 1994: 271). With this gesture, Kemalism constituted a division between what is considered modern (read Western) and traditional (read Islamic/Eastern). As Sayyid (1994) pointedly argues, this was in fact a constitutive paradox of Kemalism, which has constructed itself on the promise of the resolution of this very binary between “the East” and “the West.”

A series of unresolved tensions and ambivalences pertaining to identity-constitution proceed from this particular understanding and implementation of modernization. For one, the new regime failed to grasp, or at least to address adequately, the fact that the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire induced an unravelling of the assured, unified sense of self and identity. The gradual descent from the status of a world-dominating power to a fragile semi-colony had already laid the grounds of a tremendous narcissistic injury. Without publicly recognizing and marking in some way this loss and dislocation, the republican modernizers precipitately moved on to establishing new ideals, new objects of identification, for the people. Moreover, these new ideals for collective identification further troubled rather than mend the injured identity since they were appropriated from Europe, the center of power which was in large measure blamed by the people for the destruction of the Ottoman Empire. In this respect, the call for identification with these ideals was met with ambivalence which, under the state’s aggressive measures to crush down any questioning of the official stance, could not be consciously and productively worked out.

The modernizing elite themselves also displayed a rather ambivalent attitude towards both the imperial, Islamic, Ottoman past and towards the desired future imagined in terms of the achievement of “Western level of civilization.” On the one hand, they claimed a radical rupture from the Ottoman past. At the same time, however, the construction and justification of the new national identity necessitated affirmation of cultural roots to mark the autonomy and uniqueness of a Turkish identity in relation to Europe. In the attempts to resolve this dilemma, the elite employed shifting strategies of repression and opportunistic and selective appropriation of this past. They also produced “a new reading of ‘Turkish’ history with an emphasis on pre-Islamic elements that culminated in the notorious, pseudo-mythical and quite racist “Turkish History Thesis” (Kandiyoti, 1991: 40).<sup>25</sup> They encountered a similar dilemma with regards to the appropriation of foreign (European) ideals in the sense that such appropriation was deemed necessary for the achievement of “progress” at the same time as it was conceived as a threat to “authenticity” (Kandiyoti, 1994).<sup>26</sup> Thus, the identity that was offered as a

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<sup>25</sup> On a detailed historical and theoretical analysis and political implications of the “Turkish History Thesis” see Ersanlı (1992), on how this Thesis was incorporated into the curriculum of compulsory education see Copeaux’s (1998) discourse analysis of Turkish history textbooks from early 1930s to 1990s.

<sup>26</sup> According to Chatterjee this is in fact a fundamental contradiction of nationalist thought in postcolonial contexts: “Nationalist thought, in agreeing to become ‘modern’, accepts the claim to universality of this [post-Enlightenment, European] ‘modern’ framework of knowledge. Yet it also asserts the autonomous identity of a national culture. It thus simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture” (1986:11). To conceal this dilemma, nationalist modernizers first construct a distinction between the “material” and “spiritual/moral” spheres of culture only then to assert that the appropriation of Western institutions and ideals are confined to the “material” sphere without “contaminating” the spiritual one. This binary of material and spiritual spheres is also enveloped in a certain economy of value where the ascendancy of Western materiality (technology, science, etc.) is supposed to be balanced with or outdone by the claim of the spiritual and moral supremacy of the national culture (Chatterjee, 1986; Radhakrishnan, 1992; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). In this sense, postcolonial nationalism cannot fully disengage from the colonialist schemes of thought. Even though “political decolonization” is achieved, “epistemological decolonization” is not since rather than problematizing the universal claims of Western modernity and its Eurocentric assumptions, postcolonial nationalist thought internalizes them,

substitute to the old one—that is, the new “Turkish” national identity that people were called upon to internalize—was founded on very delicate balancing acts, which was practically unachievable for the line that differentiated “too much western” from “adequately western” was a constantly shifting one. Furthermore, this invited perpetual doubts about one’s being, his/her sufficiency in relation to the ideal. For in the name of preserving authenticity, one could be judged as being too local and provincial, shallow and narrow-minded, while too close and eager enactment of Western ideals would provoke allegations of being artificial, a mere copy and imitation (Gürbilek, 2003).

Following Gürbilek, what I want to suggest is that this process “[reduced] the ‘local ego’” to “‘a state of infant-like helplessness before the foreign ideal’” in its constant “pointing out [of] the persistent lack, the irremovable deficiency, the unyielding inadequacy” of the local self in comparison to the “original” (2003: 509, 602; Koçak, 1996). Europe functioned both as an ideal model to be followed and as the projection of a “super-ego-like critical agent” through whose gaze the failure to meet the ideal was judged. The ambivalence produced by this process on the one hand found expression as resentment and paranoia in narratives of scapegoating and plotting enemies.<sup>27</sup> On the

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sustaining and reproducing the “baleful legacies of Eurocentrism and Orientalism” (Chatterjee, 1986; Radhakrishnan, 1992: 86).

<sup>27</sup> The top-down reforms undoubtedly generated resistance among the people despite these measures. Still, the opposition found indirect ways to voice its discontent. Literature, for example, was one channel through which concerns with “excessive Westernization” and “loss of authenticity” as well as a growing feeling of “Europhobia” were articulated (Berktaş, 2005; Canefe and Bora, 2002; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). According to these criticisms, the modernizing elite:

forgot their own culture while running after someone else’s civilization. [They] were regarded as deserters of their own culture, heritage and religion in their attempts for achieving similitude with the West through servitude to it.

other hand, it manifested itself as aggression turned inward, as aggression directed at the self.

Now let me return to *Istanbul* and see this process at work and how it relates to the concept of *taşra*. *Istanbul* starts with a chapter in which Pamuk informs his readers about a particular fantasy that has continued to define his sense of being since his early childhood—the fantasy that in a different apartment in Istanbul lived a different, second Orhan who led his life “otherwise,” free from all the familial turbulence and gloom of his childhood. In Pamuk’s memories, the image of this second Orhan is identified with the “kitschy” picture of a boy which was bought from Europe and hung on the wall of the home of his aunt and uncle, where the 5-year-old Orhan was sent during one of the many episodes of his parents’ marital strife. When Pamuk’s aunt and uncle jokingly suggested that he was the boy in the picture—“Look, that’s you!”—Pamuk recalls being confused as the experience of his being did not quite correspond to the position he was so explicitly interpellated into. Despite the resemblance, he recounts, he knew he was not quite like this jovial-looking boy in the picture. While the fantasy was reassuring because at times of instability and sadness it provided him with an escape and a prospect of happiness, Pamuk also suggests that this fantasy was somewhat unnerving, in fact, “nightmarish” (4-5). This split-off double, the (European) second Orhan, endowed with a quality of fullness and harmony, acts as a constant reminder of all that is missing from Orhan’s real life. This seemingly incidental early-childhood memory that Pamuk mentions on the very

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[...] Furthermore, they were pitied as being incapable of discerning the hidden desires of the Turkish people and the incessant plans for its abuse, believed to have been devised by ‘old and calculating Europe’ (Canefe and Bora, 2002: 138-140).

first pages of the book is indeed one of the first inklings of the split position that he occupies as the narrator throughout the book.

In fact, as Pamuk's memoir unfolds, his reflections around the gap between the ideal he was *expected to* identify with (Western, modern, European, etc.) and the actual experience of his being (inadequate, pretentious, inauthentic, etc.) proliferate. What Pamuk refers to as a "ghostly" double, whose moment of emergence he cannot clearly remember but that he speculatively embeds in "a web of rumours, misunderstandings, illusions and fears," does not cease to haunt him for the rest of his life (3). He describes in gripping detail the sudden and disturbing eruption of this second Orhan in his years of adolescence as a gaze of ruthless judgement and criticism:

[...] while joking around with a friend, waiting alone in a cinema queue in Beyoğlu, holding the hand of a beautiful girl I'd just met [a] great eye would swing out of nowhere to hang in the air before me and – like some sort of security camera – subject whatever I was doing and whatever banal, insincere idiocy I was uttering [...] to merciless scrutiny. I'd be at once my film's director and its star, in the thick of things but also watching from a mocking distance. Once I'd caught myself in the act, I could maintain a 'normal' demeanour for only a few seconds, after which I'd plunge into a deep and confused anguish—I'd feel ashamed, afraid, terrorized, and terrified of being marked as alien. It was as if someone was folding my soul over and over on itself like a piece of paper, and as my depression deepened, I could feel my insides beginning to sway (278).

What Pamuk describes here is evocative of the psychic state W. E. B DuBois termed “double consciousness”: “[the] sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (1998: 125). This is a self that is split into two where one piece is constantly surveilled and judged from the disdainful perspective of the other. In this sense, it does not entail simple self-objectification, looking at one’s self from a third person’s point of view, but requires that such observation and inspection be carried out from the perspective of an internalized ideal in relation to which the self always seems to fall short. The difference Pamuk experiences between the image he has of himself and the image he perceives from the point of view of the ideal is anxiety-provoking. From the perspective of the ideal, he appears inferior—“banal,” “insincere,” and unrefined. Besides the shame, terror, pain and depression that the failure to meet the ideal creates, Pamuk also voices the self-disparagement generated by this persistent sense of deficiency:

Sometimes, even when I hadn’t done anything false, I would suddenly see I was a fake. [...] I’d see myself in the mirror on the opposite wall, and I’d think my reflection too real, too crude to bear. These moments were so excruciating I’d want to die [...] The reflection was a memento of my crimes and sins, confirmation that I was a loathsome toad (278-79).

Unlike fleeting moments of disappointment, sadness and self-beratement, what Pamuk describes here is an abiding affective structure, a structure that suggests a much more profound sense of inadequacy that actually renders the experience of his being unbearable. Finding himself in this condition of debilitating self-hatred and shame and

tormented by notions of being somehow “flawed,” out-of-place, and “worthless,” Pamuk states that all he could bring himself to do was to “go into a room and lock the door behind me” or “hide in a corner” (279, 289).

Indeed *Istanbul* seethes with Pamuk’s unrelenting expressions of dissatisfaction and dejection about himself. However, what saves the autobiography from turning into a mere narcissistic self-indulgence in despair is the way Pamuk suggestively entwines the personal with the collective. His melancholy is intimately bound up with what he describes as the melancholy of the city:

[...] with its muddy parks and desolate open spaces, its electricity poles and the billboards plastered over its squares and its concrete monstrosities, this city, like my soul, is fast becoming an empty—a *very* empty—place. The filth of the side streets, the foul smells from open rubbish bins, the ups, downs and holes in the pavements, all this disorder and chaos, the pushing and shoving that make it the sort of city it is—I am left wondering if the city is punishing me for adding to the squalor, for being here at all. When its melancholy begins to seep into me and from me into it, I begin to think there’s nothing I can do: like the city, I belong to the living dead, I am a corpse that still breathes, a wretch condemned to walk the streets and pavements that can only remind me of my filth and my defeat (286).

But what is it that renders the city for Pamuk “empty” and suspended in that liminal zone of the “living dead”; that subjects the inhabitants of Istanbul to “a kind of eternal poverty” which “slowly putrefies the city from the inside” like “an incurable disease” (38, 43, translation modified)? In one account Pamuk suggests that the fall of the Empire



and the “new concept of Turkishness” forged by the nationalist modernization movement stagnated the city, as these transformed “the polyglot, multicultural Istanbul” into a “monotonous, monolingual *town* in black and white” (215, my emphasis). Yet it is not only and simply this diminution from imperial diversity to small town monochrome that lends the city a melancholic aura. In view of the previous discussions, I maintain that it is also the shattering burden of “belatedness,” produced by the institution of European modernity as the ideal, original model of development, that saturates Pamuk’s experience of both his being and of the city with melancholy. Istanbul appears like a small town, as *taşra*—“as a child I had no sense of living in a great world capital but rather in a poor provincial city,” Pamuk writes—only from within a comparative framework that is indeed constitutive to the experience of “belatedness” (221). To Pamuk, “everything” in this city looks “half-formed, inadequate and defective” (288, translation modified). Istanbul can neither fully become the Western city it aspires to be nor “honor the traditions implied by its mosques, its minarets, its call to prayer, its history.” Instead, it appears as a “hybrid hell,” as an in-between elsewhere of the “living dead” (288). Such a perception can be formed only under the gaze of the internalized European ideal that casts a shadow of incompleteness, second-handedness or artificiality on local realities.

This perception has both a *temporal* and a *spatial* component. It entails, that is, an experience of time which, measured against a European standard of meaningful time, is found empty and wanting. It also involves an experience of urban space as provincial, shoddy and contracted in comparison to the Western city. Let me elaborate further on this point with reference to a passage, which in my view is particularly demonstrative of how

the experience of belatedness colors perception of time and space in the context of Istanbul:

I was doomed to live a long, boring, utterly unremarkable life – a vast stretch of time that was already dying before my eyes, even as I endured it.

Happy people in Europe and America could lead lives as beautiful and meaningful as the ones I'd just seen in a Hollywood film, as for the rest of the world, myself included, we were condemned to live out our time in places that were shabby, broken-down, featureless, badly painted, dilapidated and cheap; we were doomed to unimportant, second-class, neglected existences, never to do anything that anyone in the outside world might think worthy of notice: this was the fate for which I was slowly and painfully preparing myself (278-79).

At first sight, this passage looks like yet another instance of self-depreciation rather than an exposition on belatedness. However, the comparison to Europe and America is critical. It is with this move that Pamuk marks these sites as ideals where real, meaningful time is unfolding, rendering the experience of time in the “periphery”/*taşra*—“the rest of the world” outside these “centers”—empty and “boring.” With respect to Europe and America, temporality in the peripheries acquires a quality of suspension. Time, in other words, does not seem to move forward but is halted and bloated in the sense that the present feels like time immemorial as well as an everlasting, eternal waiting—it is a “vast,” “boring” “stretch” that is “endured” rather than lived. In light of this passage, the metaphor of the “living dead” Pamuk uses to describe the city and his experience of being also becomes more poignant. The metaphor unambiguously speaks to the state of

being suspended in time *and* space. In the temporality of belatedness, one is like the living dead, stuck in a spatial limbo between life and death where the very idea of the future is foreclosed. One is held-up in the limbo, waiting in uncertainty for a life to come which never seems to arrive—“the destination” perpetually “recedes” leaving one “trapped,” “suffocated,” “hopeless,” indeed “condemned” to live in monotony, in a time of repetition of the same (310).

This conception of time as repetitive, dull, always-already wasted is inscribed into the space of the city in its re-articulation as *taşra*. As I outlined in the previous chapter, in one dominant conceptualization of modernity in Turkey *taşra* is produced as the domain of the non-/pre-modern. In its spatio-temporal qualities, it signifies lack and lag in relation to the city/center. In opposition to the dynamic, luminous, distinctive, and prosperous modern urban space, *taşra* is easily forgettable in its insipidity. The imagination of *taşra* as such under this dominant understanding of modernity indeed resonates with the way Pamuk describes Istanbul: a “shabby, broken-down, featureless, badly painted, dilapidated and cheap” place that nobody “out” in the modern world would care about. On the one hand, then, Pamuk troubles the center-*taşra* binary as it is constructed in the national Turkish imaginary by writing *taşra* into the city. The spatial and temporal distance/difference between the modern urban city and *taşra* is blurred to the extent that Istanbul, the grand metropolis of modern Turkey, is experienced as *taşra*. On the other hand, though, Pamuk cannot disengage fully from the dominant discourses of modernity in the sense that he continues to imagine *taşra* as negative space/time, as some outside “wasteland,” defined against some fullness and positivity that is supposed

to exist somewhere out there in the world—more specifically in the West. This is a deep-seated effect of “belatedness” which translates the incongruity, the *difference*, between the European model and local reality into a structural, immutable *deficiency* and therefore institutes a fundamental sense of lack. As Gürbilek observes, “In the modern world being belated is imagining oneself peripheral, provincial, underdeveloped, and inadequate” (2003: 621).

What we see in *Istanbul* then is that under the grip of the affective dimension of “belatedness,” *taşra*, as an external space of destitution, stagnation, and futurelessness is inverted into the self. In other words, the internal world, one’s own self, is experienced as *taşra* insofar as this connotes a marginalized, impoverished, isolated existence. This inner experience is then projected back out onto the city which, mirroring the experience of the internal world, appears provincial (*taşralaşmış*)—emptied out, flawed, ugly, deprived, truncated, dull, filthy, wretched and without a future. The self-hatred occasioned by the continuous sense of inadequacy is also externalized as aversion to the city. Yet, while the text is powerful and moving in its illustration of the workings of the melancholic structure that “belatedness” has generated in Turkey, it leaves the very concept of “belatedness” unproblematicized. It does not quite see how “belatedness” itself is a production of Western modernity that aids in constructing and sustaining its universal hegemony by displacing the failure of its own promises and ideals, its own incompleteness, onto the problematic of “belatedness”—onto those heterogeneous elements that in some way need to be marginalized and excluded so that the internal consistency of the project of modernity is secured (Mitchell, 2000).

### II.3. Melancholic Speech and Sublimation in *Istanbul*

In light of the arguments made so far, I want now to suggest that *Istanbul* offers an amelioration of melancholy that resembles the process described by Leader. Pamuk's text enacts less a recovery of the Turkish subject's wholeness and speech than a creative depiction of the failure of these. This is visible in the text's commitment to fragmentation, and especially in the contradictions and uncertainties that surround the concept of *hüzün*.

At first, Pamuk asserts that the *hüzün* of Istanbul is distinct from what Lévi-Strauss referred to as *tristesse*, since this latter is an affect engendered in the outsider Western subject:

as he surveys those vast poverty-stricken cities of the tropics, as he contemplates the huddled masses and their wretched lives. But he does not see the city through their eyes. *Tristesse* implies a guilt-ridden Westerner who seeks to assuage his pain by refusing to let cliché and prejudice color his impressions. *Hüzün*, on the other hand, is not a feeling that belongs to the outside observer. To varying degrees, classical Ottoman music, Turkish popular music, especially the *arabesque* that became popular during the 1980s, are all expressions of this emotion, which [is felt] as something between physical pain and grief. And Westerners coming to the city often fail to notice it (103-104).

Thus, as Işın also points out, in this passage, Pamuk clearly identifies *hüzün* as “an indigenous mood” (2010: 39). It is a collective, “authentic” affect that emanates from a particular history of loss whose traces are embedded in the urban landscape, in the ruins

scattered around the city, in the dilapidated old Ottoman mansions, in the poor back streets. Pamuk goes on to “discover” this affect in practically all of the city’s details: in “women peeking through the curtains as they wait for their husbands who never manage to come home until late at night,” in “the tens of thousands of identical apartment-house entrances,” in “the crowds of men fishing from the sides of the Galata Bridge,” in “the cold reading rooms of the libraries,” in “the smell of exhaled breath in the cinemas,” in “buses packed with passengers,” in “the holy messages spelt out in lights between the minarets of mosques on holidays that are missing letters where the bulbs have burned out,” in “the history books in which children read about the victories of the Ottoman Empire and [in] in beatings these same children receive at home,” in “beggars who accost you in the least likely places and those who stand in the same spot uttering the same appeal day after day,” in “that corner of Gülhane Park that calls itself a zoo but houses only two goats and three bored cats languishing in cages,” in “storks flying south from the Balkans and northern and western Europe as autumn nears,” in “the crowds of men smoking cigarettes after the national football matches, which during my childhood never failed to end in abject defeat” (84-89).

Following this chapter, Pamuk shifts his exploration of *hüzün* to the works of the “four melancholic authors” of Turkish literature: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, Reşat Ekrem Koçu and Abdülhak Şinasi Hisar. What makes these authors extraordinary for Pamuk is their ability to participate in the collective experience of *hüzün* at the same time as they succeed in distancing themselves from this communal affect so as to gaze at the city from the outside. Pamuk maintains that it is this ambiguous

position between the inside and the outside, between “the East” and “the West,” that provided them with a “unique” perspective on the city (162). Thus, Pamuk seems to make the point that although *hüzün* is an indigenous affect rising out of the city itself, and it is something that remains largely inconspicuous to the gaze of the outsider (Westerner), it still takes a degree of distancing/estrangement to appreciate how *hüzün* infiltrates into every facet of the city.

To make matters even more complicated, about a hundred pages later in a chapter that comments on the travel accounts of Nerval and Gautier, Pamuk explicitly writes that “what I have been trying to explain is that the roots of our *hüzün* are European: the concept was first explored, expressed and poeticized in French (by Gautier, under the influence of his friend Nerval)” (210). How are we to make sense of this contradiction that pertains to the roots of *hüzün*? How is it that Pamuk first assuredly and persuasively establishes *hüzün* as a particular, home-grown sensibility and then attributes its origination to a highly Orientalizing, Western gaze on the city? Is *hüzün*, then, as Işın deduces from these contradictions, a product of “the Orientalist gaze turned into the soul of a city?” (2010: 40). And if we take this latter assertion to be true, then the credibility of Pamuk’s assertion about *hüzün* being distinctly separate from *tristesse* also becomes questionable for, as Pamuk argued, the latter implies the gaze of an outsider while the former connotes a native mood that foreigners to the city, in Pamuk’s words, “fail to notice” (104).

I suspect that this discrepancy around the origins of *hüzün* has also to a certain extent invited the accusations of Orientalism with regards to Pamuk's text.<sup>28</sup> This is partly because the text eludes a stable position from which to obtain a clear, coherent and definitive insight into the exact source of *hüzün*. Instead, it constantly oscillates between the insider's and outsider's position, or what can be construed as nativist and Orientalist positions, at the same time as it undermines both of these.<sup>29</sup> For instance, in formulating his narrative, besides relying on personal memories of the city from his childhood, Pamuk also makes use of the engravings of Melling from the eighteenth century,

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<sup>28</sup> In the mainstream media, Pamuk was harshly criticized for wittingly appealing to Orientalist sentiments as a means to allure international audiences and reap the financial and professional benefits of such (self-)Orientalization. One of Pamuk's ardent critics, Hilmi Yavuz, for instance, who dedicated a series of columns to "unmask Pamuk," argued that Pamuk positioned himself as a "colonial intellectual" who "unconditionally submits his authorial skills to the order of Orientalism" (Yavuz, April 24, 2005; October 29, 2006, my translation). In a much more sophisticated and thoughtful analysis of Pamuk's *Istanbul*, Engin Işın also admits to "realiz[ing] how much Pamuk was caught 'under western eyes' worrying about what 'foreigners and strangers' think about Istanbul" (2010: 37). He states that, particularly after reading the book in English, he noticed how it "reorient[ed] Istanbul for outsiders. *Istanbul: Memories and the City* addressed a non-Turkish speaking audience and summoned an outsider's gaze upon Istanbul yet again" (36). I agree with Işın's assessment of the difference between the Turkish and English translations of *Istanbul* and also recognize that the English version, more so than the Turkish, is soliciting an Orientalizing gaze. Reading *Istanbul* in both Turkish and English, one notices significant differences. In the English version, certain passages are completely eliminated. Some sentence structures are modified in a way that erases Pamuk's subjective inclusion in them so as to create an effect of "objectivity." There are also serious mistranslations that completely transform the original meaning. In some cases, the English translation actually states the complete opposite of the original in Turkish. While every translation entails a new interpretation and creates new meanings, in this case it just seems to venture a bit too far out from the meaning in Turkish. However, I do not think we can assuredly deduce from this, as Işın does, that this is due to Pamuk having been "caught under the Western gaze." As matter of fact, this is a shared shortcoming of Işın and the other critics I cited above. It seems, despite the varying levels of sophistication between them, they are all suggesting the same thing: that whether intentional or not Pamuk reproduces Orientalizing narratives.

Having said that, I do not wish to suggest that the reception of *Istanbul* in the West is not enmeshed in Orientalist fantasies. This is traceable in the language and tropes used in the Swedish Academy's announcement and in various reviews of the book, i.e., the readiness with which melancholy as an affect is attached to "the East," and the latent ways in which the so-called essence, the "soul", of the city of Istanbul is defined in terms of inscrutability, invisibility, depth and seduction. Neither do I want to deny that the text itself conjures up and mobilizes Orientalist imageries of Istanbul. However, as I elaborate later on, this not the *only* thing the text does.

<sup>29</sup> Since I wrote this chapter, Gökner (2013) published a book on Pamuk's oeuvre, where he also draws attention to the unstable position of the narrator (Pamuk) in *Istanbul* and elaborates on how such instability "unwittingly exposes [...] the Republican divided self" (232).



memoirs and travel accounts of authors such as Nerval, Gautier and Flaubert, which are saturated with Orientalist sensibilities, to mark what no longer exists in the modern city. Yet these passages are almost always accompanied by a narrative voice that swings between a sober, critical evaluation of the Orientalist tendencies of these Western “outsiders” (comments scattered around the text about the “dubious” nature of their observations, about their tendency to “exoticize,” about the derivative and repetitive manner of their descriptions, etc.) and an almost unbridled enthusiasm to identify with the fantasy images evoked by their work. Indeed, in a chapter towards the end of the book, tellingly entitled “Under Western Eyes,” Pamuk openly concedes that “like some other Istanbulites, my relationship to what Western eyes see in the city is troubled and, similar to other authors who fixed their eyes on the West, I also sometimes get confused about these matters” (221).

The same “confusion” and ambivalence saturates this entire section on Turkish authors. While Pamuk admires the way that Tanpınar, Beyatlı, Koçu and Hisar “praise Istanbul with an excessive and lyrical exuberance,” which allows them to notice particular, unique features of the city that are otherwise glossed over (62), he also finds fault with their aestheticization of loss, ruins and poverty. He both cherishes the nostalgic longings of these authors for a long-lost city, and gets “irritated” by this “intense nostalgia [that] almost blinds them to the dark and evil undercurrents of [the past].” In particular, Pamuk is critical of these authors’ zealous literary attempts at appropriating and domesticating the remainders of a multi-ethnic empire as elements of a mono-ethnic, homogeneous Turkish national identity—a process which entails at least an active

participation in if not an advancement of the forgetting of the past that the modernizing elites incited in the process of building a new nation (235). It is indeed against this nationalist tendency, against the post-republican will to nationalize/Turkify Istanbul, that Pamuk juxtaposes the cosmopolitan silhouette of the city as chronicled by Western authors about a century before the establishment of the republic.

In this context, what eludes the critics of Pamuk, and of *Istanbul* in particular, who merely detect in it the Orientalizing gaze of an outsider narrator, is not only those moments of scepticism and ambivalence towards both Orientalist and nativist imaginings of the city, but also the very logic of the critical gesture performed by the text. This critical gesture, which manifests itself even in the very first pages of the book, albeit in a sly and indeterminate manner, rests on a constant movement between seemingly incompatible positions (i.e., inside and outside, Orientalist and nativist) that frustrates the identification of a secure, substantial, stable point of view. Consequently, when Pamuk weaves together multiple perspectives on Istanbul from the early 1800s to 1970s, from Melling's paintings, from memoirs of Nerval, Gautier and Flaubert, from fiction and non-fiction writings of Tanpınar, Beyathı, Koçu and Hisar and from his own childhood and adolescent memories, what comes out is not a coherent narrative about the city. These multiperspectival representations fail to complement each other and/or add up to anything resembling a whole. On the contrary, what transpires is a fragmentary text ridden with self-contradiction and a cultivated semantic obscurity.

Actually, *Istanbul* is not the only text of Pamuk's where contradiction and ambiguity are writ large. In her analysis of Pamuk's *Beyaz Kale* (1985 [*The White Castle*,

1990]) and *Benim Adım Kırmızı* (1998 [*My Name is Red*, 2002]), Olcay Akyıldız (2008) also draws attention to self-cancelation and obscurity as defining characteristics of Pamuk's narrative style, which "crosses out with the left hand what is written by the right." According to Akyıldız, Pamuk's texts embrace states of "indecision," "contradiction," "confusion," and "in-betweenness" almost as a methodology. Resisting the desire to resolve, synthesize or reconcile, Pamuk's narratives cluster together conflicting positions and ideas without establishing a hierarchy between them (228-29, my translation). Further theorizing on this pronounced stylistic inclination in an article that explores the significance of the use of Ottoman history and themes in Pamuk's novels, Erdağ Göknar (2006) conceptualizes Pamuk's work in terms of a "post-Orientalist aesthetic." In his analysis Göknar demonstrates that such an aesthetic, while "[playing] with Orientalist expectations," also "manipulates the discourses of Orientalism in some measure to explode the limits of nationalism" (36-37). Göknar further reads specific elements of Pamuk's narrative style, amongst which he counts the use of fragmented points of view and multiplicity of narrators, as strategies that "subvert the orientalist-national binary," leading to the creation of new and interstitial imaginative spaces of negotiation where delinking from both Orientalist and nationalist representations becomes possible (38). In this sense, I claim that conceiving *Istanbul* ultimately as an Orientalist piece is plausible only on the condition that one reads it partially and selectively—that is, by overlooking what the text does *on the whole*.

Besides interrupting the discourses of Orientalism and nationalism, I find that there is something more to be said about the marked inconsistency, the multivocality and

persistent shifting of viewpoints that undercuts narrative stability and coherence in *Istanbul*. Especially considering the text as an example of elegiac literature, I read the ambiguities, contradictions and indecisiveness as symptoms of melancholic speech. Indeed, what makes *Istanbul* a compelling piece of elegiac literature is not only and simply its content—its relentless circling of themes of loss and longing—but also its performance of a particular structure of grieving through its narrative form and voice. That is to say, what is intriguing about the text is not only its writing *of* melancholy but at the same time its writing *in* melancholy and more remarkably, its exploitation of writing as sublimation of melancholy.

For the inconsistencies, uncertainties and contradictions in Pamuk's memoir are ways to express indirectly a melancholy that words themselves cannot express. The oscillation between conflicting positions (between Orientalism and nativism, for instance); the preference of a multiplicity of narrators and a fragmented point of view over a single, stable, unified narrator's voice; the construction of extremely long sentences with dangling modifiers which make it difficult for the reader to locate the subject of the act—all of these are creative ways of signifying and communicating the crisis of representation that haunts melancholic subject-constitution. They are means through which the blockage around symbolization is remedied and the "impossible," "incommunicable" existential experience of the melancholic subject finds expression.

Throughout the book, Pamuk himself points at this therapeutic capacity of writing by referring to how "writing" and at times "drawing" allowed him "to fight off [the] nightmare" of being "trapped [...] inside this aimless, false and suffering world, which

promised me only self-loathing and suffocation” (288). The assuaging powers of creative work and the remedial distancing it allows one from his/her own suffering are addressed most revealingly right before the chapter on *hüzün* when Pamuk writes:

*Hüzün* [is] like the condensation on a window when a tea-kettle has been sprouting steam on a winter’s day [...] I still love getting up and walking over to those windows to trace words on them with my finger. As I trace out words and figures on the steamy window, the *hüzün* inside me dissipates, and I can relax. After I’m done with all my writing and drawing, I can erase it all with the back of my hand and I can see the view outside. But the view itself seems melancholic (*hüzünlü*) in the end (79-80, translation modified).

Manipulating representations, drawing “words” and “figures,” creates apertures on the steamy window through which one can at least partially catch glimpses of the outside world that had been previously blocked and rendered inaccessible by the condensation/melancholy. These gaps/perforations that allow an experience of the “outside” as separate from the “inside,” are also themselves signifiers of absence introduced by the subject’s own act of writing/drawing. They enable a “relaxation” precisely because, in the way they rehearse in a “controlled” manner the melancholic’s nightmare of losing loss (“I can erase it all with [...] my hand”), they loosen the rigidities involved in the melancholic relation to loss, such as the resistance to its acknowledgement and relinquishment, and the intolerance for change.<sup>30</sup> While the passage is densely evocative of what a

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<sup>30</sup> See Santner, 1990 for a discussion of Freud’s “*fort/da* game” as the child’s creative attempts, “in controlled doses” to “represent absence by means of substitutive figures at a remove from [...] their ‘transcendental signified’” (19-26).

sublimation of melancholy might look like, it also is careful not to construct sublimation as a permanent “solution.” The representation of the outside view as “melancholic” at the end of the passage attests to how temporary this recovery of “the capacity to play” can be; how rapidly the self’s opening towards difference can be closed off as the profound sense of loss encroaches upon the subject, coloring all experience (Santner 1990: 20).

Indeed, while Pamuk explores and narrativizes the splitting that fundamentally shapes modern Turkish national identity in *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, he never attempts to find solutions for it. Neither does he shy away from pointing at and even enacting in his own writing the very contradictions, conflicts and ambivalences that arise from this foundational splitting. The absence of a conciliatory attitude—despite the longing for a harmonized sense of identity and the debilitating experience of loss—is a notable feature of the memoir. In the following chapter on Fatih Akın’s documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul*, I will examine the constitutive role of a particular European gaze in this splitting. On the one hand, this European gaze, which also structures Akın’s documentary, contributes to constructing and experiencing “Turkishness” as *taşra*, in ways that echo how Pamuk describes such experience in his memoir. On the other hand, the gaze in this film advances a very different view of Turkish national identity than Pamuk, one that tries to efface tension, ambivalence and contradiction. The analysis of the terms and conditions as well as the political implications of imagining Turkish identity in this manner, i.e., along a liberal model of hybridity, will guide my discussions of *Crossing the Bridge* in the next chapter.

**CHAPTER III**  
**TAŞRA AND THE FAILURE OF LIBERAL HYBRDITY IN**  
**FATİH AKIN'S *CROSSING THE BRIDGE***

German-Turkish director Fatih Akin's feature debut *Kurz und schmerzlos* (*Short Sharp Shock*) came out in 1998, but it was not until after his fourth movie *Gegen die Wand* (*Head-on*) that his films achieved transnational acclaim. This film, which folds cross-cultural and intergenerational tensions of Turkish immigrants in Germany into a tragic love story, won the prestigious Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2004. In 2005 he released the much-lauded documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul*. A musical offshoot of his breakout film *Gegen die Wand*, the documentary explored the diverse music scene of the city through the eyes of the German musician Alexander Hacke. Two years later, with his *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*), Akin won both Best Screenplay at Cannes and European Parliament's Lux Prize, an award granted to productions which highlight European integration and support cultural diversity. The film, which went back and forth between Turkey and Germany and interwove the stories of German and Turkish-immigrant characters, further reinforced a perception of Akin's work as insightful, sincere and provocative in capturing cross-cultural and intergenerational dilemmas.

On the one hand, Akin is now regarded as a skillful auteur in Germany with a creative potential to rejuvenate the New German Cinema.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, his oeuvre

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<sup>31</sup> Such a perception materialized particularly after Akin won the Golden Bear in Berlin with *Gegen die Wand*—the first German film in eighteen years to win the prestigious prize. Yet, in the preceding years there had already emerged a critical interest in “Young Turkish Cinema” in Germany, represented by directors such as Fatih Akin, Yüksel Yavuz, Ayşe Polat, Thomas Arslan among others. As Berghahn

is frequently described through categories that connote a surpassing of national boundaries. “Cinema of intersections,” “accented cinema,” “diasporic cinema,” “transnational cinema” and “cinema of hybridity” are all formulations that film scholars call upon to define Akin’s work and highlight its recurring themes of border-crossing and cross-fertilization (Berghahn, 2006; 2009; Burns, 2007; Isenberg, 2011; Mennel, 2002). His films are praised as embodiments of a new kind of cinema that moves away from a “cinema of duty”<sup>32</sup> towards “a cinema that negotiates transnationality in a playful way” (Mennel, 2002: 136; Berghahn 2009). This latter is appreciated for breaking down predictable binaries, rendering visible the “pleasures of hybridity” and “open[ing] up a ‘third space’ between the celebration and the denial of otherness” (Burns, 2007: 7; 2009; Berghahn 2009; Kosta 2010; Göktürk, 2010b).

The conceptual framework of hybridity has largely informed the celebratory reception of Akin’s documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul*—the focus of the current chapter. Indeed, what I would call a liberal-pluralist interpretation of hybridity that conceives it primarily in terms of “fusion,” “connection,” “mosaic,”

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indicates, these filmmakers were regarded as “the next wave of *auteurs* whose films are anticipated to win the international acclaim that was hitherto reserved for the *auteurs* of New German Cinema in the 1970s and early 80s” (2009: 6).

<sup>32</sup> This is a term originally used by the film critic Cameron Bailey to refer to those films which are “social issue in content, documentary-realist in style, firmly responsible in intention” and which “position [their] subjects in direct relation to social crisis and attempt to articulate ‘problems’ and ‘solutions to problems’ within a framework of center and margin, white and non-white communities” (Bailey qtd. in Malik, 1996: 204). In the particular context of European cinema, “cinema of duty” corresponds to a subgenre in the 1970s and 1980s which concerned itself with exposing the plight of the immigrant/ethnic other. While aiming to raise political consciousness, these films usually reproduced cultural stereotypes, maintained binary oppositions and constructed marginal subjectivity mainly as one of victimhood. In Germany, examples of “cinema of duty” include works by German filmmakers—such as Fassbinder’s *Angst essen Seele auf*/Ali: *Fear Eats the Soul* (1974), Sander-Brahms’ *Shirins Hochzeit*/Shirin’s *Wedding* (1976), Bohm’s *Yasemin* (1988)—as well as works by German-Turkish directors, such as Başer’s *40 m<sup>2</sup> Deutschland*/Forty *Square Meters of Germany* (1986) and *Abschied vom falschen* / *Farewell to a False Paradise* (1989) (Berghahn 2009; Burns 2007).



“mélange,” “peaceful coexistence” and “polyphony” has come to dominate the way the film has been talked and thought about (Burns 2009; Berghahn 2006; Göktürk, 2010a; 2010b; Gueneli, 2014; Jafaar, 2006; Kosta 2010). Through this lens, *Crossing the Bridge* is celebrated for both underscoring “the multicultural heritage of Turkey” and for demonstrating how “hyphenated and minoritarian literatures, films and other cultural formations negotiate ‘multiple and simultaneous affiliations and disaffiliations’” and thus disrupt fixed and totalized conceptualizations of identity and belonging (Berghahn, 2009: 4).

In particular, Kosta sees the documentary as offering “a multi-dimensional image of Istanbul that resists the ‘German’ optic of Turkishness. [...]he images in *Crossing the Bridge* collide with binary configurations and a mono-dimensional understanding of culture that have entrenched themselves in earlier representations of Turks in Germany” (2010: 343). She further argues that the documentary, through “the symbol of the bridge as the space of dynamic traversal and connection [,] challenges the long-held, yet worn-out expression of living ‘between two worlds’ or living in a state of in-betweenness and crisis” which dominated the “cinema of duty” that reduced Turkish migrants to victims devoid of agency (347).<sup>33</sup> For Kosta, the bridge in Akın’s documentary signifies “active multidirectional exchange and engagement [...] symbolizes the emotional connection to two or more places simultaneously; it stands for the transfers of knowledge and

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<sup>33</sup> While I take Kosta to be making a formal argument here about the bridge metaphor in general, she seems to conflate the experience of immigrants from Turkey in Germany with the experience of people living in Turkey as their homeland. Her argument about how *Crossing the Bridge* challenges the conceptualizations of living in-between as a debilitating condition, then, is based on the sweeping and rather untenable assumption that these latter have also been constructed as “living between two worlds” and “devoid of political power” since the documentary is about the music produced by people who live and work in Turkey and identify it as their homeland.

subjectivities that are the effect of global networks” (347). Similarly, Göktürk contends that *Crossing the Bridge* as a “localised celebration of sonic hybridity emphatically transcends binaries of an enlightened, civilized West versus a pre-modern East” (2010b: 229). Reiterating the idea that “transnational artists complicate the rhetoric of being trapped or lost ‘between two cultures,’” she asserts that the bridge in Akin’s documentary must be read not as a site of precarious suspension but one of dynamic encounter that emphasizes “mobility and flux across borders” (231).

Admittedly, the music of the city that the documentary presents is quite captivating in its heterogeneity, hybridized forms and varied sources of influence and inspiration. In this sense, *Crossing the Bridge* effortlessly appeals to a liberal sentiment that values and endorses recognition of difference, plurality and diversity. Yet, as Ang argues, the discourse of “fusion,” “connection” and/or “synthesis,” which habitually accompanies such liberal sentiment, risks “absorb[ing] difference and diversity into a new consensual culture.” It also occasions a depoliticized conceptualization of hybridity that downplays, if not domesticates, its antagonistic aspects. In this model, hybridity, stripped of “friction and tension,” “ambivalence and incommensurability” gets reduced to a “congenial amalgamation” and quite paradoxically loses the very substance to make a difference (2001: 197-198).

Besides abetting depoliticization of difference this liberal model, to which both the documentary and its dominant readings subscribe, also remains blind to how the rehabilitated metaphor of the bridge—now celebrated for its dynamic capacity to connect and blend multidirectional flows—actually contributes as a discursive device to such

depoliticization. Furthermore, in their ardent attachment to revealing the emancipatory potentials of hybridity over the crippling aspects of “living in-between,” the celebratory readings lose sight of the ways in which *Crossing the Bridge* corrodes the very assertions (of *multidirectional* influence, for example) it ostensibly sets out to defend. Consequently, they fail to notice the Orientalizing undercurrents of the documentary.

This blind spot is precisely where I begin my analysis. In the first part of the chapter, I illustrate how *Crossing the Bridge* tries to disengage from and challenge the Manichean, essentializing/Orientalizing constructions of “the East” and “the West” while at the same time reinscribing the binary through its structure and narrator’s voice. This contradiction is particularly detectable in the first half, where the documentary undermines its own premises by repeatedly subsuming hybridity into a model/copy (originator West/imitator East) framework. The narrative structure implies a journey from this “compromised authenticity” of the modern hybrid towards one presumed to be pure and untouched by modernity, which in the documentary, gets attributed to “ethnic” others. A latent Orientalizing tendency manifests itself also in the closing segment where a long-standing Orientalist will takes over the narrative and, without any evident need for justification or explication, ascribes an ineradicable melancholy to “the East.” Utterly out of touch, indeed irreconcilable, with the preceding accounts of the participants and how they describe their own experiences of Istanbul, this peculiar conclusion conveys a desire to attach affects of loss, longing and grief to the city.

On the one hand, my analysis of the documentary lays bare the limitations of the liberal-pluralist elaborations of the bridge metaphor. On the other hand, it renders visible

the structural affinities between Turkey's relationship to Europe and to its own *taşra* and the place of the bridge in this symmetry. That is to say, insofar as *taşra* stands for that constitutive periphery, which repels and enchants the center it is made subordinate to, I claim that the bridge functions as a discursive device that enables Turkey's peripheralization—a device which renders it Europe's *taşra*.

As I discussed in the previous chapters, the center-*taşra* dynamic in Turkey is very much shaped by the particularities of this relationship to Europe. “The original vs. inadequate copy” structure as well as the time-lag that Turkish modernization posited between local center(s) and *taşra*(s) are the projections of a much broader, national inadequacy induced by the encounter with what is taken to be “the original” center Europe (Ahiska, 2010: 8). Cultural critic Arğın (2005) cogently expounds on this point: when the Turkish modernizer goes to *taşra*, he writes, “s/he is ‘embarrassed’ by what s/he sees twice over: in his/her name and in the name of the West [...] S/he feels embarrassed by what s/he sees because this ‘seeing’ simultaneously reveals to her/him how s/he is seen [by the West].” Center and *taşra*, he continues, “can never really directly catch each other's eyes because their meeting always takes place under the surveillance of a third gaze.” Put differently, the center-*taşra* encounter always entails the mediation/intervention of a putative Western gaze (289-290, my translation).

But if the bridge is a part of the process of Turkey's peripheralization and the ensuing development of self-doubt and beratement, how does one make sense of the fact that it has been so enthusiastically embraced and cited (to the point of cliché) for decades as a metaphor for national identity and culture? Such unmitigated popularity, I argue, has

something to do with the ambivalence embodied by the bridge itself as a structure, with its ability to intimate both inclusion and exclusion, proximity and distance, commonality and singularity. For it is such ambivalence, in turn, that allows nationalist discourse to reappropriate the bridge as something that bestows upon Turkish identity a quality of “uniqueness” and “exceptionality,” especially in the face of perpetual self-doubts about authenticity. Indeed, the bridge as a structure that both connects and separates proves to be a perfect metaphor for a nationalism which, at least in its official Kemalist vein, has construed its “mission” as “synthesis”, as one about “*bridging* the gap between the idealized [West] and the experienced [authentic local life]” and building “an essential national culture harmonized with Western civilization” (Ahiska, 2010: 19; 10-11, my emphasis).

When I return to the documentary again in the last part of the chapter, it is to illustrate how appropriations of the bridge as an instrument of synthesis, connection and/or peaceful co-existence get questioned by particular participants. Even though mostly omitted from the existing readings of the documentary, these subjects—namely, the Kurdish buskers and the “Father” of the disparaged arabesk music, Orhan Gencebay—unravel how not only the nationalist but also the liberal-pluralist investments in the bridge metaphor draw from exclusionary, Orientalizing discourses.

### III.1. From Hybridity to “Authenticity”

German musician, Alexander Hacke, the bass player of the industrial, experimental band Einstürzende Neubauten, is the narrator of *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul*. Interviews with the local musicians, artists and producers, who provide commentary on their music and its diverse sources and inspirations, supplement Hacke’s musical explorations in the city. Besides the hybrid sounds of Istanbul, the documentary also pursues, in Akın’s words, “the question of whether Turkey is really European enough for the EU” (Dürr and Wellershoff, 2005). Indeed, one can easily make the argument that music is used as one engaging vehicle in the documentary to tackle the vexed question of where Turkey belongs. Instead of providing a direct and definite answer, the visual narration and dialogue in the documentary draw attention to Turkey’s “exceptional” location, which endows it with a particular capacity to connect and synthesize the East and the West. Thus, the bridge between Europe and Asia, whose majestic aerial shots open the documentary, gets much invoked as a favorable metaphor, especially in the first half.

In this context, it is important to note that the documentary’s highlighting of Turkey’s “unique” position is neither new nor particularly insightful. Since the late Ottoman era the bridge has been imagined as “an ideal space” that brings together Asia and Europe, the East and the West, Islam and the West/Christianity, this latter formulation gaining more currency especially in the post-9/11 global order (Ahiska, 2010). More recently, Turkey’s role as a bridge was emphasized in the debates about its accession to the European Union, particularly in the framework of liberal multicultural

projects (such as the now-sidelined “Alliance of Civilizations Initiative”) that advocate cultural diversity, protection of difference, and “tolerance” for other cultures. The release of the documentary coincided with a moment when such projects still had considerable political purchase on official and public discourses in Europe and when the long-awaited negotiations for Turkey’s official membership to the European Union had finally begun (in 2005). At the same time, Istanbul was also gearing up to be the Cultural Capital of Europe in 2010, which signaled the intentness of the negotiations. The Master Plan for the events entailed a heavy emphasis on the bridge metaphor as an “image of elegant synthesis” and staged Istanbul as “a cosmopolitan model of coexistence” (Göktürk, 2010a: 182). In Europe, while there was a mixed response to Turkey’s candidacy for full membership, a liberal, “inclusive” discourse that emphasized Turkey’s “unique” position as a bridge between the East and the West, between Islam and Europe, and perceived Turkey’s integration as a way to facilitate “cultural dialogue” was as audible as an “exclusive” one, which imagined Turkey more in terms of a “border” than a “bridge” (Küçük, 2009: 98-99).<sup>34</sup>

The laudatory reception of the film and the endorsement of the bridge as a facilitator of encounters and engagements with difference must be considered also in light of these specific political conditions. The crucial issue to be examined here, though, is not so much that the documentary emphasizes and tries to valorize difference, diversity and hybridity, but the particular manner in which it does these, the way it imagines

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<sup>34</sup> See Bülent Küçük (2009) also for an insightful analysis of how the European liberal multicultural discourse, which deploys the bridge metaphor to promote “cultural dialogue,” “alliance of civilizations,” integration and so on, is ridden with Orientalizing assumptions.

difference and how it sets up the encounters and engagements with it. Hacke's position as narrator/"protagonist" is key in this respect.

When *Crossing the Bridge* first came out, Ali Jafaar from *Sight and Sound* referred to it in his review, favorably, as "Eastern Vista Social Club" (2006: 5). The invocation of Wim Wenders' *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999), a documentary where American musician Ry Cooder goes to Havana, resurrects the careers of long-forgotten traditional Cuban musicians and produces an album for them that subsequently becomes a major international hit, has since been criticized. The objections to the comparison seem to emanate especially from a vigilance against the Eurocentric and colonial entanglements of *Buena Vista Social Club*.<sup>35</sup> Göktürk, for instance, asserts that compared to Cooder, "who positions himself center stage and foregrounds his own importance in [...] 'making [Cuban musicians] heard,'" Hacke represents "a more casual and subdued spirit of collaboration" (2010a: 187). Similarly, Kosta sees Hacke as a mediator who "enters the 'foreign' space somewhat seamlessly." Even though she acknowledges that at times his "voice-over evokes a stereotype of the Western traveler who has entered an exotic oriental space only to be left mesmerized," she upholds that his "chameleon-like existence" complicates this image (2010: 349). Kosta takes issue with the comparison also on the grounds that "Wenders nostalgically territorializes and petrifies Cuban culture" whereas "Akin explores Istanbul as a space of confluence and change" (346). I will return to questioning this latter point about nostalgia and petrification later on when I discuss the concluding segment of the documentary. For now, I want to lay out how

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<sup>35</sup> For a perceptive analysis of *Buena Vista Social Club* which connects the documentary's colonial and Eurocentric inclinations to the political economy of the genre of "world music," see Oberacker, 2008.



Hacke's presence in the documentary is neither as unobtrusive nor as benign as these scholars maintain, but rife with familiar colonial and Orientalist tropes.

When we first see Hacke riding in a cab that takes him to his hotel, his voice-over informs us about both the motivation and the purpose of his trip to Istanbul:

For me Istanbul [...] is a mystery. I decided to capture the sounds of this city in order to figure them out. I prepared myself well: I'm traveling with a dozen microphones, computer software, hard disk drives... Everything I might need.

These first self-explanations tally with how Akin initially envisioned Hacke in the streets of Istanbul, as a "detective" whose defining trait is, of course, solving mysteries in a methodical manner (Bax, 2005). In the same interview, Akin continues to disclose other inspirational figures which helped him visualize Hacke in Istanbul as a "guide": "The way he wanders through the streets he looks like a Viking sometimes, or a cowboy. I liked the image of a giant walking through a foreign city." While I do not want to reduce the meanings of the documentary solely to the director's intentions, the specific ways in which Akin envisioned Hacke's involvement seem to have largely determined both the latter's performance and the overall framing of the documentary. What brings together the figures of the detective, the cowboy and the Viking is not only their heroic quality, but also their association with a dominating hypermasculinity. In the case of the latter two, this hypermasculinity is also indelibly bound up with colonial ideals of conquest, discovery, expansion, and mastery. In this sense, Hacke is not merely a "guide" or a "narrator;" he is the white Western male hero—on a mission to penetrate into and master

the (feminine) Orient and reveal her secrets to the West—with whom the target audience is invited to identify.

This analysis is borne out by the short synopsis of the documentary at the website of German Films Service and Marketing (“the national information and advisory center for the promotion of German films worldwide”):

[*Crossing the Bridge*] describes a Western point of view, a view from the distance, in a foreign, tense, erotic, dangerous, tempting city. [...] These days plenty of DJ’s, musicians, and artists from all over the world come to Istanbul. They are looking for inspiration, driven to lift the veil of the graceful beauty’s secret.

It is difficult not to be taken aback by the text’s almost verbatim repetition of the nineteenth-century Orientalists’ representation of the East in terms of a dubious femininity and as a land of “secrecy and sexual promise” despite the existence, for decades now, of copious criticism of such conceits (Said, 1994: 222). Even the metaphor of the veil, deployed for centuries in Orientalist accounts to convey the so-called inscrutability and hidden essence of the Orient is sustained together with all the phallogocentric implications of the desire to “lift the veil.”<sup>36</sup>

Then again, one need not resort to any outside material to recognize the Orientalizing, colonial gaze of the documentary. Hacke’s opening voice-over about

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<sup>36</sup> See Yeğenoğlu’s *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (1998), especially the second chapter “Veiled Fantasies: Cultural and Sexual Difference in the Discourse of Orientalism,” where, through close readings of nineteenth century Orientalist travel literature, she argues that the veil signifies more than a piece of clothing for the Orientalist. With illustrative examples, she demonstrates how the Orientalist will to know what is behind the veil is intricately linked to the voyeuristic pleasures of a male gaze and saturated with the sexual desire to penetrate.

solving mysteries, about “capturing” and “figuring out” the city’s sounds, juxtaposed over images of him unloading miscellaneous hi-tech sound and recording equipment at his hotel Grand Hotel de Londres—a popular residence among Western travelers in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—evokes Said’s depiction of the Orientalist subject as an “interpreter” (1994: 166). This is a subject who systematically records, observes and studies the Orient to “translate its foreignness,” and “decode its meanings” for the West (103); a subject whose aim is to “make available to his compatriots a considerable range of unusual experience” by “filtering [the Orient] through regulatory codes, classifications, specimen cases [...] all of which together formed a simulacrum of the Orient [...] for the West” (166). The task of the interpreter is indispensable for he is supposed to be the mediator who finds a hook for the “uninitiated Western [audience]” which would otherwise, it is assumed, “resist the assault of untreated strangeness” (67). In *Crossing the Bridge*, Hacke, as the primary figure of identification, fulfills the role of the interpreter whose judgment the spectator is expected to trust. Not given the opportunity to explore and pore over the sounds themselves, the spectators are asked to rely on Hacke’s ability to discover, select and present for them the most interesting and valuable pieces—i.e., put together “a series of representative fragments”—from these unfamiliar sounds (128).

In the interview that I quoted from earlier, Akın also explicitly addresses this issue of acclimatizing an unversed Western audience and explains how they tried to accomplish this through the structure of the documentary. They started the film with relatively familiar, hybridized sounds and “progressed gradually to the roots of this

mixture, from globalised Istanbul to the people's identity" (Bax, 2005). Here, he seems to suggest, the accessibility of the first half, devoted to Istanbul's experimental, electronic, rock and hip-hop scenes, helps render the second half, comprised of pieces from arabesk, mystic fusion, Romani, Kurdish and classical Turkish music, more digestible and "likeable" for the viewer. There are a few troubling assumptions in this formulation which also find their way into the documentary and keep compromising the claims it tries to assert. One concerns assimilating hybridity into the categories of accessibility and familiarity, which entails conversion of alterity into the self's own terms, transforming difference into identity (Yeğenoğlu, 1998). As I will shortly illustrate, the original/copy model that the documentary latently but consistently installs in the first half is an extension of this particular approach to hybridity. Another dubious implication of Akin's statements concerns the editing which, as he intimates, structures the narrative in a way to indicate a progression towards the authentic, *from* hybridity—the imitation, the superficial mixture, etc. which in Akin's formulation, all seem to lack "identity"—and *towards* the "roots," which, according to the logic of the statement, signify "pure" difference. Thus, it is the ethnicized locals of the second half, the Roma, the Kurd, the Turk, who embody authenticity and represent "people's identity" as opposed to the ungrounded hybrids of "globalised Istanbul." While too foreign to be directly metabolized, once engaged, the supposedly unsullied music of the ethnic other holds the promise for a "real" experience of originality and cultural authenticity. Let me now turn to an analysis of some particular details to clarify how all this plays out in the documentary.

The first group interviewed in *Crossing the Bridge* is Baba Zula, an experimental-psychedelic rock band, who are filmed performing on a boat that sails across the Bosphorus (the strait that connects Europe and Asia) so as to delineate their hybridized sound. The members indicate how living in a “unique” location like Istanbul informs the kind of music they make. They explain, for instance, how they use traditional Turkish instruments, such as the darbuka (goblet drum) incorporated into the classical Western drum set and the electro-saz (the long-necked Anatolian lute) borrowed from Arabesk music, to produce a distinct psychedelic sound with unique beats.

In the next scene, the documentary raises implicit questions about how Baba Zula members had defined and claimed affiliation for their work by shifting into a disagreement between the managers of the independent record label DoubleMoon.<sup>37</sup> As one manager starts the interview with the customary preamble, “Istanbul is Asia and Europe. It’s East and West. But this is an advantage. We try to be European, but at the same time we are open to the East,” he gets interrupted by his partner’s cynical comment: “if you’re *trying* to be European that means you aren’t European.” The figure of the imposter and the divisions between authenticity/inauthenticity, original/imitation that punctuate the film’s first half get introduced in this manner through the mouths of the local music producers. What becomes noticeable as the segment unfolds, however, are the ways in which the bands and musicians featured in this half resist constituting themselves and their work within the constrictive parameters of this original/copy model. While they try and shift the terms of the debate by describing their creative process more

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<sup>37</sup> DoubleMoon is the producer and distributor of most of the bands and musicians featured in the documentary. The soundtrack of the documentary was also released under this label.

as a form of organic collage that invents something new (as Baba Zula in the opening sequence demonstrate), the voice-over and editing try to roll back these attempts and contain them yet again within an original/copy structure.

For instance, Hacke introduces hip-hop artist Ceza as one of the representatives of the “black music of Istanbul.” The exact meaning of this phrase is not very clear, but the formulation itself is already suggestive of a comparison with an origin/original (i.e., black American rap). The decision to retain this description in the introduction without any revisions is puzzling since Ceza and his friends spend considerable time in the following sequence explaining how their music *differs from* black rap, which gets collapsed into the category of “gangsta style” in the participants’ broad-stroke account. While his friend asserts that their rapping is political and speaks to issues of their particular milieu (it refers to “us, just as we are”) as opposed to the “gangsta stuff that does not exist in Turkey,” Ceza maintains that although his sound is similar to some American rap, he has “never even considered ‘doing gangsta’—all that girls and money talk.” Instead, his lyrics are about “serious subjects that concern everyone.”<sup>38</sup> In effect, Ceza and his friend are drawing attention here to the embeddedness of their music in local realities. They appropriate a global cultural form and “make [its] expressive resources relevant to their own [lived] experiences and concerns” (Solomon, 2005: 17). The result is a new, hybrid form that integrates the local and the global at the same time as it gives voice to an authentic experience/existence firmly grounded in a specific place.

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<sup>38</sup> The participants in this sequence make rather sweeping claims about “the American rap scene” and do not at all consider that what they refer as “gangsta” is not a uniform and homogeneous style.

From here the documentary cuts immediately into a rather bizarre sequence where a young man who calls himself CJ poses next to a flashy car and tells the camera in English: “check out my wheels. Fifty million... I’m Turkish and all, but I lived in the States for a while [...] just trying to keep it real. I’m out!” The scene is confusing because the audience is given no clues as to who this person is. Is he another rapper? Someone from Ceza’s circle? Or just a random guy on the street? The insertion of this sequence, especially in the absence of any explanation, invites doubts about what Ceza and his friends had just claimed about local experiences and calls into question their credibility and authority. It undercuts a more complex understanding of hybridity precisely at the moment of its articulation by interjecting a crude “imitation” model that bears no relation to what Ceza had said.

This is almost a compulsive tendency in the documentary. At the beginning of the sequence on the rock scene in Istanbul, Hacke’s voice-over first resolutely informs the viewer that “Istanbul is a rock city.” This assertion is immediately supplemented, however, with the statement “there are a lot of bars that *cover Western music*” as if to amend the temerity of the initial claim (my emphasis). In this way, just as the documentary reduced Istanbul’s hip-hop scene to a simple case of derivation from a Western original, it now truncates the city’s decades-long, complex and quite diverse experimentations with rock music into a matter of “covering” Western “originals.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The documentary includes a brief interview with Erkin Koray, one of the pioneers of psychedelic folk/rock in Turkey since the early 1960s, whose experimentations with traditional Turkish instruments and Anatolian folk songs have influenced contemporary rock bands in Turkey, including some that are featured in *Crossing the Bridge*. Koray’s inclusion in the documentary does indicate some awareness of the long history of rock in Turkey. However, the content of the interview is rather dismissive of this history and its multiple actors in the way it depicts Koray as a solitary figure who managed to survive in a hostile cultural

To avert any misunderstandings, I want to note here that I do not think of this urge to mark origins/originals in terms of an intentional, calculated attempt to denigrate the city, its music and/or the participants. Rather, I see it as a symptom of an anxiety around the potential dissolution of established borders which help constitute and secure the European/Western subject. Insofar as Orientalism constitutes a discursive edifice through which the European/Western subject procures his unity and coherence by projecting internal conflict, fragmentation and otherness onto an external site, i.e., the East, the unequivocal difference of the East must be ensured. That is to say, this process of exteriorizing otherness demands that the East be made into and remain a constant supplier of contrasting images. For it is these images that not only help shape and define the European subject but also deflect the latter from facing his own repressed internal conflicts and inconsistencies.<sup>40</sup>

From this perspective, when the East gets less distinguishable from the West—as happens with the hybridized subjects and forms in the documentary—its otherness must be reinscribed in some way to re-affirm and secure identity. This is similar to a gesture that Said (1994) points out in the specific context of Orientalist scholarship. When the Orient seemed to resemble the West too closely in these texts or when its “virtues,” so to speak, were accounted for, such praise was immediately cancelled out by a reference to some deficiency. In this way the East is produced as both familiar, “because [it] pretends

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environment that singled him out as “excessive” and eccentric and consistently tried to hamper his career. While a lot of avant-garde artists were subjected to different forms of marginalization at the time, there also existed a counterculture niche that sustained and supported these artists.

<sup>40</sup> See Grosrichard (1998) for the elaboration of this psychoanalytically-informed understanding of the workings of Orientalism. Grosrichard’s sophisticated study is particularly important in the way it fills a curious gap in Said’s *Orientalism*, that is, the absence of an engagement with Orientalist literature on the Ottoman Empire.



to be like the West,” *and* alien, “because although in some ways [it] is ‘like’ [the West,] it is after all not like [it]” (72). This “vascillation,” characteristic of Orientalist imaginary, also lurks in Akin’s documentary. In this fluctuation hybridity is invoked not only to indicate familiarity, but also to signify distance and alienness. In Hacke’s introductions of the local artists, the seemingly casual references to points of origin<sup>41</sup> mark the hybrid from the first as something that is spatially and temporally distanced from the original. Along with the narrative structure of a journey toward authentic roots, this in turn incites an understanding of the hybrid primarily as a derivation, as a lesser, second-rate, and, in one way or another, a lacking form—something “symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a [Western] equivalent” (Said, 1994: 72).

The gesture of indicating points of origin would not be so striking if the documentary applied this frame equally to all the participants. However, there is no mention of roots, origins or even influences when the direction of the cultural flow/influence is reversed from a West-East to an East-West axis. In these cases, the lurking concern with the question of whether or not hybrid subjects/forms are imitations is suspended. Instead, these sequences are framed such that the subject’s seamless integration into a foreign culture is foregrounded in mystifying ways; that is, without providing any insight into the details of this process. This is the case with Brenna MacCrimmon, a Canadian musician who compiles and sings little-known Turkish and

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<sup>41</sup> I already mentioned the reference to black music for hip-hop. For rock, first “the West” is generally mentioned as a “place” of origin. Later on, Hacke refers specifically to Seattle while introducing the Turkish grunge band Duman.

Balkan folk songs.<sup>42</sup> As soon as MacCrimmon begins to speak, it is very hard not to be mesmerized by the ease with which she expresses herself in a language other than her own. While she continues to talk and sing in perfect Turkish, the viewer is left completely in the dark about the crucial and perhaps most intriguing aspects of her experience: How did MacCrimmon come to sing and speak in Turkish so fluently, with an almost impeccable awareness to the rhythm of the language let alone the music? What motivated her interest in Turkish and Balkan music? What effect has this encounter with a different musical tradition had on her sense of being, professionally and otherwise? What does it mean to embody a subjectivity that seems so effortlessly at home and affectively present in a foreign language and in a culture commonly coded as “alien” to her own? Pursuing answers to such questions could have led the documentary in a path which would warrant its critical acclamation, for then it would have perhaps addressed, in much more complicated and critical ways, the issues that scholars and commentators have precipitously aligned the documentary with—issues that concern cultural *exchange* and confluence, reciprocity and/or multidirectionality of cultural flows, diverse modalities of hybridity, etc. Rather than avoiding, neglecting or indeed unintentionally reproducing them, the documentary might have then become more attuned to the “specific power relations and historical conditions that [configure] the interactions and encounters which induce [...] processes of hybridization” (Ang, 2001: 197).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> This information is not provided in the documentary. Indeed, neither Hacke nor any other participant introduces MacCrimmon. The audience is expected to deduce from her short interview who she is and what she does or else conduct a little research of their own to figure out this information.

<sup>43</sup> To avoid belaboring this point any further, I refrained from including an analysis of the sequence with Mira Hunter—a Sufi whirler who performs in the documentary with Mercan Dede, a Turkish DJ and composer who fuses ambient electronic sounds with traditional mystic/Sufi music. As with Brenna

It is quite remarkable how the notions of exchange, confluence, interrelation, hybridity, fluidity, etc. that get affiliated with the bridge in the film's first half get dropped as the documentary progresses. Particularly in the second half, the bridge gets completely disassociated from such metaphorical elaborations and transforms into something akin to a border that the Western subject crosses to access an "undiluted" cultural difference that inhabits a distant time and place.

One indication of this shift is the evident alteration in Hacke's manner and conduct in his encounter with the sounds of Romani, Kurdish and classical Turkish music. The figure who had been moving around the city with ease and confidence, leisurely recording, dancing, drinking and playing with Istanbul's hybridized musicians and bands, now becomes a distant and careful observer. This transformation is particularly discernible in a scene where he meticulously sets up his hi-tech equipment in a small beerhouse outside Istanbul, in the *taşra* town of Keşan, to record the local Roma musicians. Given the undisputed presence of the Roma in Istanbul's urban culture especially in the entertainment industry, it is not clear why Hacke is made to take a bus out of the city to "find" and record Romani music, except that the travel over space from the center to the periphery, to *taşra*, also surreptitiously implies a travel in time, from the present to the past, from the modern to the pre-modern.<sup>44</sup> Inside the beerhouse, between Hacke's spectatorial presence and the exoticizing gaze of the camera, what is supposed to

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MacCrimmon in this case, too, the audience is not provided with any information about Hunter or how, as a North American woman, she came to practice whirling—a traditionally male practice in Sufism.

<sup>44</sup> Until recently Sulukule, a district in the historic old city of Istanbul, was home to one of the oldest Roma communities in Turkey. Under the sweeping wave of urban renewal projects which has ravaged the city since mid-2000s, the Roma were forced out of the historic settlement and relocated to housing projects built miles away, in the outskirts of Istanbul. At the time of the filming of the documentary, the gentrification project was at its very initial stages and the Roma had not yet been dislocated.

be a casual improv takes on the quality of a full spectacle. If the mobility of the camera which restlessly navigates the room appeals to a desire to see and observe *more* of the other, the extreme close-ups of the musicians and half-drunken Romani men raising their glasses to the film's spectator titillates the desire to see this other *more closely*.

The reverence with which Hacke approaches the participants—not only the Romani musicians but all the ethnicized bodies of the second half—is animated by this sense of discovery, of having finally penetrated into the hard-to-reach “root,” i.e., the “purely authentic other.” Here, the (presumed) inaccessibility of the other, on the one hand, renders it rare and precious, hence soliciting the need for scrupulous recording, archiving and preservation. On the other hand, the inaccessibility itself must first be fabricated to enable the act of transcending it. To put it more plainly, a “mystique of inaccessibility” is constructed around the other in order to play out the fantasy of its discovery and preservation/protection (Huggan, 2001: 178).

In the documentary such mystique is generated by the particular ways in which the “authentic other” is filmed in staged settings, unlike the musicians and bands of the first half. To be more specific, what the documentary marks as hybrid sounds/subjects are shown to be embedded in contemporary, modern, urban space. The shots of the bustling city streets, which are intercut with the interviews as well as the inclusion of public performances by these participants, convey their symbiotic relationship with the city and urban populations. In contrast, the documentary severs the tie of the “authentic (ethnic) other” with the city and, by extension, with modernity, by placing these participants in spaces that detach them not only from their own respective audiences but also from the

time and place of the present. For instance, Müzeyyen Senar, the diva of Turkish classical music, and Sezen Aksu, “the queen” of Turkish pop, are both filmed under highly-staged circumstances, in rooms that are decorated in ways that insulate them spatially and temporally from the city that, in actuality, is a fundamental force that fosters the genres of music they perform.<sup>45</sup> In this way, their performances are not simply decontextualized, but almost museumized in the way they are estranged from contemporary everyday life and displayed as objects that belong to some other time and place.

Such decontextualization and exhibitionistic display of the other becomes most evident, however, in the filming of Aynur, who is asked to perform a Kurdish elegy (astonishingly) in an eighteenth-century Ottoman *hammam* (Turkish bathhouse).<sup>46</sup> The filming of a gendered and ethnicized body in one of the most notorious sites of Orientalist imagery in part re-enacts the associated male fantasy about accessing a space coded, alongside the Ottoman *harem* (the seraglio), as a forbidden domain of female sexuality. At the same time, just as in the other cases with Senar, Aksu and the Romani musicians, Aynur’s particular location detaches her and Kurdish music from the contemporary city. The *mise-en-scène* thus works in a way that “denies [the other] a

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<sup>45</sup> Senar, in an ornate stage costume and with full make-up, is filmed in a room adorned with a red carpet, dark velvet curtains and old-fashioned wallpapers. The orchestra behind her is made up of elderly men (Senar, who died recently in 2015, was 86 years old during the filming). The overall effect of the setting is an uncanny one generated by the sense that a long-gone era has been brought back to life for purposes of display. Senar also evokes the temporality of a mythical past as she starts her interview by saying: “Once upon a time there was a Müzeyyen Senar. That’s me.” Aksu, dressed in a much more conservative outfit than her usual stage costumes, is also filmed in a similar room with the silhouette of the city only vaguely discernable from the windows behind. The lighting in the room, accentuating tones of yellow and light brown, creates the nostalgic sepia effect. Her singing is intercut with black-and-white images of the city from the past, which fortifies the temporal dislocation.

<sup>46</sup> Hacke explains the choice of setting for Aynur’s performance by referring to the “incredible acoustics” of the space. However, this reasoning is not very satisfactory given that acoustics had not been a priority before and that he had recorded other musicians in less than favorable aural circumstances.

living culture” and produces it as outside the present (Fee qtd. in Huggan, 2001: 159). Once transposed elsewhere, encapsulated in another time and place, this other is also prevented from “crossing those fictional but ideologically essential boundaries between [...] the Exotic and the Familiar, the Past and the Future, the Dying and the Living” since its presumed purity derives from isolation, from its externality to modernity (Fee qtd. in Huggan, 2001: 159). The documentary determines the appropriate mode of engagement with such exquisite difference to be the removed relationality of observation and recording rather than the sociable one of participation and collaboration.

The Orientalizing vein that I have been mining gets picked up once again in the concluding section of the documentary where, amongst her countless songs about Istanbul, Sezen Aksu performs one of the most somber and nostalgic: “İstanbul Hatırası” (Memory of Istanbul). While the lyrics themselves register nostalgic reminiscings of the city’s past, her performance is interspersed with black-and-white images of Istanbul. The song’s orientation towards the past and the affects of gloom and longing that it invokes are difficult to reconcile with the participants’ narratives of their experiences of the city. If anything these narratives suggest that the present is more gratifying compared to the past. This is true not only for what the documentary marks as “hybrid” subjects, but also for the ones it reifies as ethnicized, authentic, “unblended” identities. Members of the rock band Replikas, for instance, talk about how their sense of dislocation and alienation in the past was transformed into one of empowerment in the present when they were finally able to see beyond an internalized system of value biased towards the West and stake their creative claims to local sounds which they had previously been accustomed to

spurn. Similarly, Aynur, while underlining the historical, political and cultural marginalization and injuries that Kurds in Turkey have perpetually been subjected to, still expresses in unresentful ways her desire for a more just future. Thus when the participants, even the ones who are most afflicted in the present, do not profess a yearning for the past, a conclusion that attaches an obscure sense of loss to the city and to its inhabitants feels out of place if not disrespectful. It exudes Orientalist associations, especially those that attribute to the East an abiding sorrow and grief, imagined to be ceaselessly flowing from a transhistorical, innate and insurmountable lack.

### **III.2. The Metaphor of the Bridge and Its Discontents**

I have so far offered a reading that brings to the fore moments of contradiction and incoherence which are evaded in the centered, celebratory accounts of the documentary. Indeed, the claims about the film's promotion of "a new cultural imagination" and border-transcending potentials of hybridity can be sustained only through the repression of these moments that reinscribe borders (Kosta, 2010: 343). Similarly, the bridge can be construed as a metaphor of connection, mutual and/or multidirectional exchange by ignoring the terms and conditions—specific relations and asymmetries of power—that enable and organize these practices. As the documentary itself also demonstrates, in the absence of such critical attention a liberal-pluralist perspective easily slides into a conservative one which "patronizes as it promotes respect, ghettoizes even as it fosters inclusion" (Huggan, 2001: 153). The bridge, within such a framework, becomes a regulatory device that spatially and temporally differentiates Europe from Turkey (from

non-Europe) and delimits it either as an inadequate copy or as a reservoir of authenticity untainted/not-yet-tainted by modernity. In both cases, a developmentalist understanding which defines Turkey's relationship to modernity as peripheral and belated is centrally at issue.

A similar thing happens at the national level—in terms not of Turkey's relationship to “Europe,” but of its centers in relation to its peripheries. In fact, to some extent, one can read the documentary's use of the trope of the bridge as re-enacting globally a long-standing metaphor of national identity, particularly in the way it imagines a spatiotemporal journey over that bridge (and backward in time) to the roots. It is such national implications of the metaphor that I want to consider now. I will subsequently examine how specific participants in the documentary reveal the limits of this foundational metaphor.

In her book on early Turkish radio broadcasting which traces the influence of Occidentalism on Turkish nationalism and its conceptualization of modernity during the first decades of the republic, Sociologist Meltem Ahiska remarks that the bridge is perhaps the “most stable identity” that Turkey sustained, both inside and outside the country, “since at least the nineteenth century” (2010: 15). Nationally, the appeal of the metaphor stems partly from its discursive capacity to screen deep fissures and conflicts that upset hegemonic Turkish identity. As I discussed at length in the previous chapter, Turkish national identity is constructed on a fundamental splitting between the East and the West that reproduced itself in the dichotomies of native/foreign, traditional/modern,



religious/secular, *taşra*/urban. While official Kemalist nationalist discourse<sup>47</sup> reproduced these binaries internally,<sup>48</sup> it also simultaneously promised a cure for the split: harmonious synthesis (Ahıska, 2010).

It is important to note here the double task that official Kemalist nationalism takes on. One of these tasks entails an ‘external bridging’ which aims at conjoining Turkish identity—an identity that is historically identified with “the East” in the European imagination—with “the West.” Here, being a bridge enables “access to both the essential identity of the nation and Western modernity” (2010: 17). The bridge, in its capacity to connect and separate, at once allows for the possibility of merging (becoming one with the West) *and* licenses a distinctive national identity. As such it also grants Turkish national identity a quality of singularity and “exceptionality.” Ahıska (2010) identifies the construction of “exceptionality” around national identity, wherein the bridge metaphor is operationalized as one constituent in a defensive gesture. In its attempt to forestall comparisons, the gesture can be construed as a “displaced reaction against the colonization of the West” (8). In this sense, to the extent that it is used as a trope to suggest exceptionality, the bridge metaphor is a symptom—a symptom of “the fear that

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<sup>47</sup> Following Bora, I use the term “official Kemalist nationalism” to refer to “Atatürk milliyetçiliği” (Atatürk nationalism), which has a “strong modernist-Westernizing vein,” to differentiate it from “ulusçuluk”/ “ulusalcılık,” which Bora translates as “left-wing Kemalist nationalism” (2003: 438-439). This latter has become influential since the 1990s as a secularist response to the rise of Islamism. While “ulusalcılık” appropriates the left-wing discourses of Kemalist nationalism from the 1960s and 1970s, it is defined by an anti-Westernism that postures as anti-imperialism. For an insightful discussion of different types of nationalism in Turkey and their relationship to the official one see Bora, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> The internal reproduction of the East/West binary was inescapable within the Eurocentric conceptualization of modernity amongst the Kemalist elites where modernization was “equated with” Westernization (Gülalp, 2003: 388). As Sayyid explains, “to modernize, the Kemalists had to Westernize, but the very nature of Westernization implied the necessity of Orientalization since you can only Westernize what is not Western [...] One had to represent the oriental before one could postulate westernization as an antidote” (1997: 67).

‘our’ modern national identity is in fact a mere imitation” (8). On the flipside of exceptionality resides a profound anxiety about the authenticity of national identity.

Alongside the external one, official Kemalist nationalism also aims at an “internal bridging” between metropolitan, urbanized, modernized, Westernized segments of the society and those of the rural and *taşra*. While in theory this bridging suggests a congenial encounter between the West and the “authentic roots,” or at least a peaceful coexistence of the native and what was generally conceived as “foreign,” in practice it has mostly amounted to the expectation that *taşra* gradually “advance” towards the center. A dominant assumption has been that with economic development and modernization, *taşra* would along the way shed its excesses (such as the influences of tradition, of Islam, Arabic, Kurdish, Persian and other “Eastern” cultures), domesticate its difference, and come to embody a palatable authenticity paired with a Western at-homeness. Its denizens would “dress in Western garb, develop a taste for Western music, adopt Western architectural styles, read and write in Western alphabet and so on” (Gülalp, 2003: 388). To be “bridgeable” and included as a desirable national subject, then, one needed to fulfil certain predetermined expectations. Despite its inclusory aspirations, internal bridging was therefore conditional and entailed an unfeasible attempt to contain the highly unpredictable process of hybridization.

In *Crossing the Bridge*, Orhan Gencebay, one of the pioneers of the music genre arabesk, reveals the limits of this attempt, and by extension, those of the bridge as a metaphor for national identity and culture. He appropriates the basic assumptions of the dominant discourse of modernization in a way that valorizes the hybrid genre that has

been degraded by the same discourse as a malformation wrought by insufficient modernization. To appreciate fully Gencebay's critical gesture, it is necessary to explain briefly what arabesk is and what it signifies within the imaginary of Turkish modernization.

In her detailed study of the genre, Özbek describes arabesk as “a hybrid genre mixing Turkish classical and folk elements with those of the West and Egypt”; the genre gained popularity at the end of 1960s, especially in the urban squatter settlements populated by migrants from *taşra* (1997: 211). The composers and performers, including Gencebay, were more often than not migrants themselves. The lyrics primarily gave voice to the migrant's feelings of displacement, desolation and frustration and, especially during the initial period of arabesk's emergence, articulated new desires and demands in the encounter with the urban landscape.<sup>49</sup> For the established, Westernized urban classes, state bureaucrats and intelligentsia, however, arabesk was a “deviation.” It “revealed an inner Orient” that impeded Westernization and epitomized “insufficiently suppressed ‘Arab’ influences and traditional elements” (Stokes, 2010: 74). It was not just that its sound, deemed “too Arabic” or “too Oriental,” did not fit into the sanctioned forms of hybridity, but as an “illegitimate” hybrid, so to speak, it also “contaminated” the “pure,” authentic sounds of Turkish folk and classical music that it was drawing from. In terms of content, arabesk's submission to fate and valorization of inexorable suffering were framed exclusively as signs of a resistance to agency, to progress, development and

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<sup>49</sup> As Özbek emphasizes, while arabesk retained its hybrid form over the years, its “content, production, reception patterns and social significance have changed markedly since the 1960s.” This transformation, she continues, can be traced along the transformation of capitalism in Turkey—“from nationalist developmentalism to [...] transnational market orientation after 1980s” (1997: 212).

change. As such, arabesk signified a threat to modernity within the dominant official model of modernization. What was initially a hostile reaction to a particular hybrid genre of music, has gradually become a way of expressing discontent with divergence from this model. Arabesk has come to

[...] describe virtually anything in Turkish social life [that was] considered degenerate: arabesk democracy, economy, people, tastes, sentiments, and ways of thinking and living. It was as if the term had finally provided a name for the problem of Turkish identity (Özbek, 1997: 224).<sup>50</sup>

With this framework in mind, let me now turn to a close reading of Gencebay's account of arabesk as he elaborates it in *Crossing the Bridge*, as this account “undoes” the “authoritative discourse” of modernization through a paradoxical move: by using the same discourse to reinscribe within it what it had excluded (Young, 1995: 21-22).

Gencebay starts the interview by drawing attention to the implications of disparaging arabesk, which “have always disturbed [him].” “Arabesk means Arab-influenced,” he explains, to imply that denigrating arabesk actually entails “insulting other cultures, cultures outside of our own.” In this way, he first distances himself from the racist presumptions of the modernization discourse. Thus, when he subsequently speaks from within the same dominant discourse to align arabesk with some of the most foundational ideals of modernity, his speech remains untainted by vestiges of racism. To demonstrate

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<sup>50</sup> Arabesk has been embraced by conservative populist political movements of post-1980s and by influential political figures in this period. However, its depreciatory perception still endures amongst Kemalist-modernist, secularist urban classes. For an extensive overview of the history of the genre and shifts in its reception see Özbek, 1997; Stokes, 1992; 2010.

in detail how the rest of this disruptive re-appropriation takes place, it is worth reproducing Gencebay's account in detail:

What we wanted to undertake were some *technical studies*, which we had seen to be previously done in Egypt—a place similar to ours. I mean, technically..., Egypt had already integrated *Western technique* [into its music.] Turkish music did not quite yet have such practices. We were engaging in these practices to *enhance* our own music. We were undertaking *research*. Conservatives objected to this because they were working towards preservation; there were only few attempts at *progress* [in music]. When we did that [work towards progress], we did not damage our cultural heritage, which still stands today as it has always been, like a monument. I mean, working towards preservation...All of us, everybody, already does that anyways (translation and emphasis are mine).

Here, Gencebay makes a few critical moves that in the end help produce arabesk as both modern and authentic. First, he frames arabesk as a genre that performs an officially sanctioned form of hybridization: something that combines a Western superstructure (technique) with a native, “authentic” base. In his reference to Egypt as a source of inspiration, he reveals a misconstrued assumption of the dominant narrative which supposes, rather rigidly, that Western influence follows a direct line from “the West.” In this sense, the account he offers is a more sophisticated version that recognizes the decentralized nature of cultural flows. Yet, it is an account that still appeals to the occidentalism of the dominant modernization discourse. Through such an appeal, i.e., by pointing out arabesk's connections to Western techniques, it seeks to authorize arabesk as

a legitimate genre within the dominant paradigm. Next, Gencebay resorts to a language of development, progress and science to describe the musical experimentations he engaged in while composing arabesk. In the way it associates the genre with an innovative modernity, this gesture does not only discredit the prevalent perception about arabesk's essential animosity to the modern. It also makes the bolder claim that arabesk, in effect, represents a much more authentic and progressive spirit of modernity than the kind of "conservative" modernity that its critics have espoused. The discourse of these latter, which has served to identify arabesk as a regressive and reactionary hodge-podge that corrupts pure cultural traditions, is thus reversed. In other words, the dominant discourse is turned against itself and undermined not by referencing some external principle, but by insisting on its chief assumptions and standards to render visible how this discourse itself fails to meet them, and indeed violates them. Arabesk is then claimed as a truly modern cultural product, befitting of modern, inventive national subjects who are not content with doing merely what is their duty as citizens, i.e., preserve cultural heritage, but go above and beyond it and build upon and "enhance" this heritage.<sup>51</sup>

I spent some time elaborating on the example of arabesk, through Gencebay's interpretation, in order to illustrate the limits of the bridge metaphor for Turkish national culture and identity. As the case of arabesk elucidates, not all kinds of synthesis are included or desirable under the metaphor in its dominant form, where it has come to function as a ruse of power that masks the subjugation and marginalization of those who do not fit or refuse to fit into the prescribed regimen of hybridization. Arabesk constitutes

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<sup>51</sup> There is, of course, a lot of variation within arabesk in terms of techniques, sounds, themes, etc and not all performers/composers define and practice the genre in the particular way that Gencebay does.

a particularly suspect hybrid in this context, given its close affiliation with *taşra* and the chain of uneasy and conflicting associations that this concept evokes in national identity-formation in Turkey. I focused on Gencebay's case at length also because this is one of the few moments in the documentary where hybridity emerges as a voice not just of reconciliation, but also of contestation, as a voice that undermines dominant structures of thinking as it speaks through them.<sup>52</sup>

A second moment of contestation transpires during the filming of a group of buskers, Siya Siyabend, a band whose improvisational performances bring together the art of storytelling with a range of genres such as Turkish folk, jazz, protest and industrial rock music. Here, the members' narratives implicitly call into question elaborations of the bridge not so much as a national metaphor for synthesis but for peaceful coexistence. During this sequence one member, whose Kurdish descent becomes apparent in the course of the interview, recounts a visit to his hometown in the Eastern part of Turkey in mid-1990s:

We could not move along the road because there were checkpoints every 50-60 kilometers. Each time, we were taken off the vehicle and searched. There was a huge sign on one side of the road: "Love for forests means love for the country." I turned my head to the other side. I saw a forest ablaze. That's how they burned down and destroyed our homes (my translation).

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<sup>52</sup> I find it important to note here that a contestatory hybridity does not necessarily always translate into progressive political practice. Gencebay's disruption of dominant modernization discourses or his radical musical interventions have never materialized in his involvement in progressive politics. On the contrary, Gencebay's political commitments have always lied with those of the conservative and neo-liberal political parties.

There is something uncanny about this scene, about the particular image of a sign, on one side of the road, whose meaning does not just get voided but perversely derided right across, on the other side. It is as if the scene embodies the monstrous double of the bridge whose spectacular image the documentary presented to the viewers over and over again: the majestic bridge that brings together two disparate places, *connects* one side to another; the bridge which stands for perpetual flow and mobility in liberal discourses, and for unison in those around national identity. For this to be sustained and reproduced, the other image—the one marked by technologies of division and border-control, checkpoints and body searches—the image of interruption and destruction, must be repressed. Indeed, what enables the first image, what makes possible its construction, durability and stability, is the disavowal of the second one and of what takes place there. The inclusion of the band member's narrative in the documentary is poignant in this respect. It disrupts the dynamics of disavowal which are necessary to be able to adopt and appreciate the bridge either as the liberal-pluralist metaphor for peaceful coexistence or as the nationalist one for a harmonious and inclusive identity.

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In this chapter, I have offered a reading of Akın's critically-acclaimed documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* which diverges significantly from and challenges its dominant interpretations. My objections to these interpretations entail their oversight of the latent ways in which the documentary repeats and reproduces the structures and power dynamics of Orientalism. I have further claimed that inattention to power relations, which is endemic to both the documentary and its dominant readings,



occasions a hasty and uncritical embrace of the bridge as a metaphor for connecting with the other, for a conciliatory hybridity as harmonious amalgamation, and/or for peaceful coexistence of difference. In the first part of the chapter I illustrated how the documentary undermines the metaphorical elaborations of the bridge that it purportedly endorses in the specific ways it reinscribes Orientalizing binaries into the narrative by containing hybridity within a model/copy structure; by constructing and reifying difference in a primitivist manner; and by attributing an inexplicable and eternal sorrow to “the East.” I argued that within such a configuration, the bridge no longer signifies a blurring of borders but slides into being a border itself. In the second half of the chapter, I shifted my focus from a global utilization of the bridge as a discursive device to connote liberal-pluralist ideals of syncretism and peaceful coexistence, towards a national one where the bridge has provided a foundational metaphor for national identity and culture. Here, I pointed at the highly conditional and exclusionary underpinnings of the official discourse of modernization and nationalism in Turkey which, on the one hand, calls upon the idea of synthesis to constitute and authorize authentic identity, and tries to regulate that synthesis by defining acceptable and unacceptable forms of hybridity, on the other. The last two cases I discussed from the documentary, the examples of Orhan Gencebay and Siya Siyabend, are pertinent in this context. The narratives of these participants disrupt dominant discourses of modernization and nationalism and expose in their own distinct ways how the metaphor of the bridge fails internally/nationally, too.

The concept of *taşra* might have seemed “peripheral” to these analyses, but this is so only in the specific way that I have been conceptualizing “peripherality” in this

dissertation—in the sense that despite the semblance of exteriority, the concept has been fundamental for the shaping of the central arguments. This is particularly true for my discussions of the Orientalizing Western gaze of the documentary, which, as it constitutes Turkey as Europe's *taşra*, also deeply informs how *taşra* gets produced and represented internally. My next chapter explores these questions in detail through close readings of the films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan.

## CHAPTER IV

### PROVINCIALIZING THE METROPOLITAN CENTER:

#### *TAŞRA* IN THE LATE WORK OF NURİ BİLGE CEYLAN

In the last decade a new genre has emerged in the cinema of Turkey—a genre that takes life in *taşra* as its main focus. This new orientation finds expression in the works of renowned filmmakers such as Nuri Bilge Ceylan and Semih Kaplanoğlu but also in the internationally lesser-known yet equally significant works of Ümit Ünal, Özcan Alper, Yağmur and Durul Taylan, and Reha Erdem. These films not only make *taşra* central but do so by way of formal techniques that have the effect of aestheticizing their subject. The long takes, slow tracking shots, color palettes of yellows and greens, frugal dialogue and use of natural sounds all work to create a pastoral vision of *taşra* that significantly diverges from its more common, more disparaging representations. The shift points to a new imagining of *taşra*; even though it is not always “beautiful,” this *taşra* is highly stylized in ways that often invest it with positive value, suggesting that the positive element in the double-construction described in my Introduction has recently become visible in new ways.

The film scholar Tül Akbal Süalp (2010a; 2010b) explains the emergence of this *taşra*-affirmative cinema as an artistic expression of the depoliticization of the post-1980s. According to Süalp, the defeat of organized oppositional movements following the 1980 military coup has created an atmosphere of political blockage and pessimism about the future. The coup not only clamped down on existing institutions of political critique, but also heavy-handedly discouraged serious critical analysis, cultivating instead

a culture of amnesia and anti-intellectualism. One significant motivation behind the ruthless mutilation of dissent and critical thinking was to introduce with relative ease the new structural adjustment programs that aimed at integrating Turkey into the global capitalist system. By the mid-90s, Turkey was incorporated into the world markets but with all the destabilizing and disorienting effects of rapid capitalist transformation. Süalp contends that in the face of such sweeping waves of transformation and the uprootedness they install, *taşra* emerged as a space of refuge. The designation of *taşra* as an “artificial paradise” was further reinforced by the economic and cultural hegemony of the new *taşra*-embedded bourgeoisie, which has in a related development produced and circulated glorified representations of *taşra* (Süalp, 2010a: 65, my translation).

In this context, Süalp (2010b) makes two separate but interrelated arguments about the new *taşra* films. First, she remarks that they delineate a romanticized image of *taşra*, defined by qualities such as the relative slowness of time, harmony with nature, intimate social ties, and a life not yet fragmented by modernity. In this respect, *taşra* is presented in these films as possessing the cure for the disillusionment and alienation of urban characters, who, in their search for meaning, travel to (romanticized versions of) *taşra*. Her critique of the new *taşra* films is not limited, however, to their idealization of this space. In a second move, she contends that such idealization is frequently accompanied by an indifference to political analysis of the conditions that stifle the characters in urban settings. In other words, the characters are *just* shown to be depressed, desensitized, bored and exhausted in the city, but the films offer no insight into why and how such discontent and dejection are produced in the first place. It is in this sense that Süalp refers

to these films as depoliticized and “without a problematic,” for they “avoid analysis” and refrain from identifying the real causes of the problem they are depicting (2010b: 111-112, my translation). As she elaborates, these films “do not provide us the filmic material that would enable us to perceive the sources of the individual’s unhappiness, of his/her existential crisis, the things that force the individual to search for alternatives. We are deprived of the material that would suggest to us that the director has actually thought about such issues” (2010b: 103, my translation).

In a similar interpretation the film critic Cüneyt Cebenoyan (2010) likens the new *taşra* films to the “Heimatfilm” of post-war Germany. This latter was a cinematic response to the trauma of the Second World War, which made it difficult for many Germans to imagine a viable future. In their inability to project a different future from the ruins of the present, these films invested in constructions of an idyllic time and space—typically in rural settings imagined to be uncontaminated by the disasters of war and modernity in general. According to Cebenoyan, the 1980 coup has had a similar effect on the political imagination in Turkey, in the sense that it has radically undermined the hopes and dreams of a better future. The post-1980 cinema, particularly the *taşra* films of the last decade, are for him expressions of this loss of belief in futurity. As he further explains, in contradistinction to the pre-1980s films where the city still signified advancement, opportunity and the promise of a more prosperous life, in the post-1980 films the city appears as the locus of frustration and unfulfillment. The individual, rather than heading for the city, is now looking for ways to escape from it. In this new configuration, *taşra* assumes an analogous role to Heimat as the imaginary space of

security and salvation. For Cebenoyan, the recent (re)turn to *taşra* in Turkish cinema signifies a “regressive” attitude not only in terms of the kind of conservative politics it implies but also in terms of the backward movement towards a fantasized originary wholeness. In other words, Cebenoyan reads this (re)turn as indicative of a desire to re-experience primary narcissism. These films are about the desire to recapture childhood bliss, and hence they position *taşra* as either a caring, enveloping Mother or a protective and non-punitive Father.<sup>53</sup>

Both Süalp’s and Cebenoyan’s approach to the new *taşra* films is guided by a concern to locate and make sense of these films within the broader trajectory of the political history of Turkey and Turkish cinema. This concern enables some of their most illuminating claims, but comes at the cost of a tendency toward over-generalization. Even though they occasionally refer to some specific films in their discussions, the absence of close and detailed readings of particular films yields an analysis that does not do justice to the complexity and ambivalence that some of these films display in their articulations of *taşra*.<sup>54</sup> This is particularly the case with the films by Nuri Bilge Ceylan that constitute

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<sup>53</sup> There are points of convergence between the Süalp’s and Cebenoyan’s analyses of *taşra* films with that of Suner’s (2005; 2010), which I sketched out in the first chapter. However, Suner makes a distinction between what she calls “popular nostalgia films” and the films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan in her discussion of *taşra*’s contemporary cinematic representations. As I indicate in the following pages, I find making such a distinction pertinent to avoid making vague and untenable generalizations.

Furthermore, while both Süalp’s and Cebenoyan’s analyses contain important insights to make sense of the recent proliferation of *taşra* films, I discern in their understanding of *taşra* a presumption that marks *taşra* as a site of the primitive, the premature. That is to say, return to *taşra* can be conceptualized as “regression”—as in Cebenoyan’s articulation—only if it is defined from the start in a pejorative way; only if it is postulated as a lower stage in development.

<sup>54</sup> Amongst the films Cebenoyan and Süalp refer as “regressive” and/or “depoliticized” *taşra* films are Özcan Alper’s *Sonbahar* (2008 [*Autumn*]); Semih Kaplanoğlu’s trilogy *Yumurta* (2007 [*Egg*]), *Süt* (2008 [*Milk*]), and *Bal* (2010 [*Honey*]); Reha Erdem’s *Kosmos* (2010); Yeşim Ustaoğlu’s *Pandora’nın Kutusu* (2008 [*Pandora’s Box*]) and Çağan Irmak’s *Babam ve Oğlum* (2005 [*My Father and My Son*]).

the main focus of the current chapter. While Ceylan's cinema, as Süalp maintains, has by and large determined the style and aesthetic principles of the new *taşra* films—influencing and inspiring the work of many directors with his particular mis-en-scène, characteristic camera angles and movements, colors, etc.—his films cannot be neatly subsumed by the critical categories and aesthetic strictures that Süalp and Cebenoyan put forward.

Strangely enough Süalp's (2010b) article surreptitiously demonstrates the difficulty of comprehending Ceylan's work within the parameters of her analysis. The few times that she mentions Ceylan's films, her discussion swiftly slides into the discussions of other films and directors without adequate clarification of how exactly the films of Ceylan exhibit the depoliticizing tendencies she describes. A certain ambiguity accompanies, moreover, Süalp's treatment of Ceylan's cinema. On the one hand, she seems to differentiate the director's early work, namely *Cocoon (Koza)* (1995), *Small Town (Kasaba)* (1998) and *Clouds of May (Mayıs Sıkıntısı)* (2000), from both his later work and other examples of the genre on the grounds that these films depicted *taşra* from an insider's perspective. Put differently, rather than constructing idealized images of *taşra* from the perspective of a distant onlooker, as most contemporary *taşra* films do in Süalp's reading, she suggests that Ceylan's earlier films reflected life in *taşra* "realistically." On the other hand, Süalp indicates that Ceylan's later work, specifically *Distant (Uzak)* (2002), *Climates (İklimler)* (2006) and *Three Monkeys (Üç Maymun)* (2008), moves away from the realism of his earlier films towards a more formalist and abstract filmmaking. Süalp's analysis frames this shift as unfortunate and stifling for

Ceylan's cinema. However, her observations about Ceylan's change of style do not fit smoothly with her argument about the politically-suspect production of *taşra* in contemporary Turkish cinema. Neither does she explicate if (or how) Ceylan's later films relate to *taşra*, given their focus on stories that take place in urban settings, more specifically in Istanbul.

The distinction Süalp makes between Ceylan's early and late films has in fact been commonly posited in various readings of his oeuvre (Daldal, 2003-2004; 2006; Gülbudak, 2008; Şimşek, 2009). These readings share a tendency to celebrate Ceylan's plain, "sincere," "naive," "intimate," and "tender" approach to *taşra* in his earlier films. Daldal (2003-2004; 2006), for instance, argues that up until *Distant*, Ceylan's cinema evinces the principles of what Kracauer referred to as "slight narrative." Avoiding "dramatic tensions," and refusing to exploit the technical capabilities that define most mainstream fictional film, Ceylan's earlier works aspire to reflect the "raw reality" and daily routine of *taşra* in a similar manner to *cinéma vérité* (2003-2004: 259-60, my translation). Minimalist in terms of their content, these early low-budget and artisanal films recruited his relatives (non-professional actors) to "play" the main characters, which, according to the critics, further contributed to the spontaneity, "sincerity" and "naturalness" of his filmmaking. Furthermore, the *taşra* that Ceylan portrayed in these films was the *taşra* that he grew up in. In this sense, too, the critics claim—echoing Süalp's remarks—that the *taşra* which emerged in these films was real and convincing both for its stylistic features and for the way it issued from biographically formative experiences.



It is precisely in this mode of filmmaking that Gülbudak (2008) and Daldal (2003-2004) locate the political significance of Ceylan's early work. While in terms of content they could not be regarded as examples of politically-engaged cinema, in their form they signified a resistance to the dominant, "excessively commercialized" manner of filmmaking. Gülbudak asserts that these films "were political in their naturalness" (2008, my translation). In their renunciation of expensive and extravagant techniques in favour of a non-commercial filmmaking founded on slow-paced montage (lingering long takes, slow tracking shots, and so forth), they withstood the ideological appropriation of cinema, an appropriation which worked to reproduce and sustain the hegemonic culture of consumption. These films, in which nothing seemed to happen, also frustrated the habitual expectations of the audience "to be entertained." Hence, the critics claimed them as powerful examples of non-conformist, anti-consumerist cinema.

With *Distant*, the critical consensus began to shift. Here Ceylan for the first time left *taşra* as a setting and shot the film almost entirely in Istanbul. Although the film is regarded as the final part of his *taşra* trilogy (along with *Small Town* and *Clouds of May*), critics identified it as heralding an elemental shift in his filmmaking. The main figures in *Distant* were still played by non-professional actors—Ceylan's cousins, who played similar characters in *Clouds of May*—but the antagonism between them now became the central element that drove the story. This is what Daldal (2003-2004) points out when she writes that with this film Ceylan moves away from "slight narrative" by introducing "sharp dramatic tensions" into the story (267, my translation). Besides exploring the *taşra*-center relationship through the awkward and agitated relationship between the two

characters, this film also delved into issues concerning gender relations and urban alienation. These shifts towards more conventionally dramatic narratives and exploration of issues other than *taşra* seem to have disturbed critics, though it is interesting to note that it was only after the release of his next film *Climates* that they retroactively framed *Distant* as the beginning of a “decline,” a harbinger of some sort of “degeneration” in Ceylan’s cinema (Daldal, 2006; Gülbudak, 2008; Süalp, 2010).

*Climates* focused on the disintegrating relationship of an urban, professional, middle-class couple played by Nuri Bilge Ceylan himself and his wife Ebru Ceylan. Except for the relatively short sequences at the beginning and the end, the film was once again shot entirely in Istanbul. Daldal (2006) and Gülbudak (2008) referred to the film as “postmodern,” “nihilistic,” “superficial,” and “rambling,” qualities which signified a radical departure from Ceylan’s realist/naturalist style. His following film, *Three Monkeys*, for the first time featured professional actors and was again set in Istanbul, narrating the survival story of an underclass family who live on the social margins of the city. One of the most influential mainstream film critics in Turkey, Alin Taşçıyan (2008), wrote that the movie was “the most insincere” of all Ceylan films in its content although it constituted one of “the most impressive” in its style and form. She further stated that *Three Monkeys* testified to Ceylan “leaving [...] behind” the “amateur spirit” which had so far rescued his films from the pretensions of highbrow, art-house cinema. She concluded that with *Three Monkeys*, Ceylan’s films “lost their innocence.”

What is striking about these criticisms is their covert correlation of the so-called “decline” of Ceylan’s cinema with his apparent departure from *taşra* as the main setting

of his films. Put differently, the severity of the criticisms intensifies as the city becomes Ceylan's central locale. In the critics' eyes, his stories become less convincing (less "real"), at once shallower and more conformist, as they move into the city. There is, in this sense, a resemblance between the positive responses to Ceylan's early works and one dominant and celebratory conception of *taşra* as the seat of authenticity, innocence, intimacy and simplicity. It is as if these qualities, which cannot be readily located in Ceylan's films, are projected onto Ceylan's *style* of filmmaking (i.e., realist/naturalist, minimalist, sincere, non-commercial/amateur, etc.) and get reincarnated in the critics' perception of his early work, which was primarily about *taşra*.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, when Ceylan leaves *taşra* as a geographical location, critics' responses to his films repeat the dominant discursive terms used by some established urban elites in discussing recent migrants from *taşra*: such people lose their innocence and authenticity, are overcome by pretension, and embody a deracinated existence in the city.

Such readings also inadvertently reduce the political significance of Ceylan's cinema to a matter of representational accuracy. What the critics emphasize in their praise for Ceylan's early work is the "sincerity" and "naturalness" with which they depict *taşra*. Latent in the critics' admiration of these films is an investment in the idea that the *taşra*

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<sup>55</sup> Ceylan's treatment of *taşra* has been complex in the sense that it resists the binary frameworks through which *taşra* has been predominantly produced. In the following section of this chapter, I elaborate on the ways in which Ceylan's films complicate the received conceptualizations of *taşra*. Suner (2005, 2010), whose work I build on in my analysis of Ceylan's cinema, also argues in her reading of Ceylan's trilogy that in these films *taşra*-as-home is shown to be familiar, intimate and caring at the same time as it is confining and boring: "it is everything we wish to leave behind, and a place that we always long for" (2010: 110). According to Suner, these films acknowledge but do not attempt to resolve the "paradox of belonging." Instead, they "[invite] us to live with the paradox" (111).

they reveal is “real” as opposed to its distorted, fantasmatic representations (Algan, 2010). Such investment is partly informed by a perception of Ceylan as a “native informant”—a presumption that his familiarity with *taşra* enables him to tell it “like it is.” Thus, when Ceylan’s cinema shifts towards the city, it is as if, the critics imply, he ventures into a territory he is inadequately familiar with. His stories then lose their credibility; they “ramble on” and/or become politically indifferent if not conservative in their inability to comprehend and articulate the sources of urban malaise.

In what follows I offer a reading of *Climates* (2006), *Three Monkeys* (2008) and *Once upon a Time in Anatolia (Bir Zamanlar Anadolu’da)* (2011) that diverges from and challenges the criticisms I outlined above. My analysis proceeds from the idea that upon a close and detailed cross-reading, Ceylan’s so-called “later works,” whose plots often unfold in the city, are still fundamentally “about” *taşra*. These films reveal a much more nuanced understanding of *taşra* than one finds either in Ceylan’s earlier work or in the critics’ accounts, one that neither extols it as a place of refuge from the maladies of modernity nor vilifies it as a site of the non-/anti-modern. This new figuration emerges from the way the films divorce it from being only and simply a concrete geography. In my analysis of *Climates*, I argue that *taşra* assumes the characteristics of a psychic state, describing an internal alterity that dwells within the subject and within the experiences of intersubjective relationships. In the section on *Three Monkeys*, I discuss how it comes to stand for the migrant’s sense of deprivation, isolation, constriction *inside* the city and the yearning for a more gratifying life. In this regard, the *taşra* which emerges in these films seems to me to exceed the limits of interpretations which are concerned with uncovering

and solidifying what *taşra* really is. Without giving it a permanent and definite shape, *Climates* and *Three Monkeys* circle around *taşra* as a once-projected fantasy of otherness that now haunts from the inside, haunts indeed precisely because what was once outside is now “inside” (Gürbilek, 1995; Suner, 2010).

Finally, as Ceylan returns to the quintessential *taşra* in the Anatolian heartlands with his *Once upon a Time in Anatolia*, it emerges as a space that has gone through the transformations wrought by the two films that precede it. Here, the relationship between modernity and *taşra*, which lingers in the background of Ceylan’s earlier work, becomes thoroughly visible. With its explicit references, both through its content and formal elements, to modernity’s foundational ideas and institutions—such as reason, rationality, scepticism, legal and scientific procedure, progress, bureaucracy—I interpret *Once upon a Time in Anatolia* as a film that reveals how these ideas and institutions fail in their attempts at grasping *taşra*. Their failure, however, is not framed in the film as an effect of *taşra*’s innate resistance to modernity or its inherent inability to reproduce modern ideas and institutions. Rather, *taşra* does not quite fit into the knowledge systems and conceptual maps that modernity draws on to master and comprehend it. *Taşra* not only exceeds what modern science and law can know but in its capacity to do so it also reveals the limits of modern knowledge. While on an individual level the film figures *taşra* as a space in which different characters are compelled to encounter what they have previously repressed—a space where they gain access to a knowledge that they were not able to access before—on a broader level it also presents it as a site that discloses what modernity has to exclude, marginalize or repress to constitute its internal consistency.

Essentially, in my engagement with Ceylan's films I seek to shift the terms of debate on his work in particular and on the cinematic representations of *taşra* in general. I maintain that such a shift is necessary not only to discern the complexity and thickness of the meanings *taşra* acquires in these films but also to appreciate adequately the far-reaching political implications of Ceylan's work. Ceylan's *taşra(s)* blurs the neat boundaries between the inside and outside, self and other, intimate and foreign. As these films associate otherness (of/as *taşra*) less with the outside and the external than with the inside and the internal, they articulate in cinematic form what remains opaque in the particular theoretical formulations of *taşra* in this dissertation. Insofar as these films approach *taşra* as an intimate/internal exteriority that unsettles and destabilizes the center—whether this center stands for the unified subject, the grand metropolis or historicist narratives of Modernity—they also urge us to think critically about the contemporary modes through which such otherness is engaged and managed.

#### **IV.1. *Climates: Taşra within the Subject***

At first sight, interrogating the meanings of *taşra* in *Climates* may seem like an odd pursuit. Not only does the film take place mostly in Istanbul, but the main characters are professional urbanites who do not have any immediate connections to *taşra*. The story the film tells concerns the protracted break-up between İsa, a professor of architecture approaching middle age, and Bahar, who works as an art director for TV productions. The fact that the couple lives in Istanbul suggests that *Climates* might best be read as exploring how urban professionals face the challenge of recognizing and negotiating

difference in amorous relationships. However, what are surely two of the most decisive moments in any film, the beginning and the end, take place in *taşra*. I deem that such insertions of *taşra* (especially at such key moments) into an urban film about coupledness are not incidental and that *taşra* carries a much more decisive function in the film than as an ancillary setting. As a concrete location, as a place of peripherality and marginality, *taşra* is mobilized figuratively, too, to allude to the couple's exhausted relationship as well as to İsa's depleted affective state.

From one perspective, then, the film draws from *taşra*'s received codifications as a space of destitution and stagnation to convey affective circumstances. However, it diverges from these understandings in one significant way: it tackles *taşra* as a descriptor of the *intimate/internal* world of the urban characters rather than as a distant, external place of deprivation outside the city. Put differently, *Climates* interiorizes *taşra*, and in so doing complicates and alters the conventional understandings of its spatial dimension as an "outside."

Nowhere is this interiorization more striking than in the way that *Climates* tampers with notions of immutability and repetition that are commonly associated with the temporality of *taşra*. In the film "empty repetition" (repetition of the same) is cast as something that pertains not to the actual place of *taşra*, but primarily to the psychic landscape of an *urban* character who is ensnared in a loop of destitution and discontent. At the same time, whenever *taşra* appears as a concrete place, it appears as the *only* place where any real movement and meaningful transformation occurs. The temporal meaning of *taşra* is thus recast and even scrambled: an urban character is caught in the loop of the

empty repetition conventionally marking this non-urban location, while the geographical location itself becomes infused with the possibility of change. In light of such emphases, the title of the film gains a complex meaning. While “Climates” may at first seem ill-suited for a film that follows the seasonal cycle—a film where narrative development is aligned with the passing of seasons—as the story unfolds, it becomes clearer that the title is not adopted simply as a more poetic reference to cyclic weather conditions. It alludes instead to long-standing pressures and hard-to-change patterns that organize the characters’ internal worlds—a kind of return within the urban subject of what that subject has historically projected and abjected as external-*taşra*.

*Climates* starts in the summer when the couple is on vacation together in Kaş, a small, tourist *taşra* town on the Mediterranean. In these opening scenes at an archaeological site, the camera primarily follows Bahar. A long, close-up shot of her face, as she pensively observes İsa from a distance, is the first image on the screen. Shortly afterwards, as we watch Bahar watch İsa from afar, while he is taking pictures of the ruins, she quietly becomes unhinged: she first nervously smiles, then suddenly grows serious, somewhat bitter and angry until finally tears start to run down her cheeks. The image of her teary eyes juxtaposed against the background of the ruins is an initial suggestion of the impending end of the relationship. The juxtaposition itself, meanwhile, signals that shift in meaning I have described, in which *taşra* becomes a space less of stagnation than of the only movement in the film—a movement indicated by the tears that presage the dissolution of the couple’s relationship.



The extent of the couple's romantic strife is revealed, first subtly, in the tense silence that fills their hotel room, which contains two separate beds, and then more forcefully through a cringingly uncomfortable scene in which İsa and Bahar engage in mutual tongue-lashing at a dinner with their friends in Kaş. To dissipate the tension that hangs over the dinner table, İsa engages in a conversation that at the time sounds like small talk, but that, in my reading of the film, acquires more substance in retrospect. He asks his friend who lives in Kaş if life is “interesting” there. The friend complains that “it’s boring,” and “besides the favourable climate, there’s nothing else. If only we had more people—friends like you, why don’t you visit more often?” Such a reply might seem at first glance to confirm the conventional association of *taşra* with boredom and stasis.

Yet rather than merely confirming that association, this first summer section also establishes how boredom and dullness are afflictions that consume the main couple's relationship. Throughout this sequence, the couple is framed in ways that evoke the distance between them—rather than lovers on vacation they look and act as if they are two strangers who were coerced into spending time together. They hardly ever talk to each other and when they do, their conversation gravely lacks in vivacity and genuine interest in the other. In this context, I find it important to note that in contradistinction to the recent cinematic depictions of *taşra* as a haven that offers comfort and restoration of harmony to distraught urban characters—depictions that have been problematized, as I mentioned, by film scholars and critics—the *taşra* of this first segment of the film is where distress, discontentment and discord surge up and explode. It is, at last, in *taşra*

that the languid relationship obtains energy and movement even though such movement brings about its dissolution.

The lead-up to the dramatic break-up scene takes place on a deserted beach and is composed of two segments which correspond respectively to Bahar's and İsa's points of view on the relationship. The first segment starts with a close-up shot of Bahar's face, covered in sweat. Her sweating, as is soon revealed, has less to do with the heat than with the dream she is having. In the dream, İsa first tells Bahar that he loves her and then buries her face under the sand. Terrified, Bahar wakes up, only to recall the equally chilling reality of a partner who, in complete disregard of her evident distress, scolds her for falling asleep under the sun. Disconcertedly, she walks towards the shore and stares at the sea, which, in contrast to the claustrophobic sensation of the previous scene with İsa (transmitted to the audience through the tight angles and close-up shots of the characters' faces, the sweating and the heat that flood the diegetic space), expands boundlessly before her eyes. Indeed, in this whole segment, the insistent juxtapositions of wide-angle shots of the landscape and the sea with the close-up shots of the characters accentuate their entrapment in a failing relationship but also the looming possibility of breaking out of it.

The second segment begins with a close-up of İsa talking, expressing his wish to end the relationship. The editing of this segment interlaces his "real" break-up talk with his "rehearsal" of it, making it impossible to distinguish between the two.<sup>56</sup> In both cases

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<sup>56</sup> İsa is shown talking to himself while Bahar is swimming. The camera focuses on his face as he is trying to figure out his lines for the break-up speech. Yet, when the camera moves out from İsa's face, while he is still talking, we see Bahar sitting next to him and hence cannot tell which parts of İsa's speech Bahar actually heard.

İsa's speech is equally contrived and armored. One thing viewers know for sure is that İsa ends up telling Bahar, in one form or another, that he wants a separation. Although the conversation between them is terse, it still exposes how the couple had been caught in repeated quarrels that they were unable to resolve, particularly over İsa's infidelity, which he refers to as an "insignificant event." Bahar's initial response to all that İsa says is one of agitated-calm. Her subdued anger and resentment towards his patronizing cruelty and her resistance to letting go of the relationship (despite her own suffocation in it, as the previous dream scene illustrates) are revealed in the next scene, when Bahar tries to cause an accident as they are riding back from the beach on a motorbike. On a deserted mountain road, with barren lands on one side, and the open sea on the other, İsa and Bahar jostle one another after they recover from the initial shock of the accident. In a sobbing fit, Bahar leaves on foot as İsa screams after her in rage.

I have spent some time on the plot elements of these opening scenes in order to stress two things. First, while the scenes are enormously disturbing in their chronicling of the relationship's dissolution, they also point paradoxically to the possibility of that relationship becoming "unstuck"—moving beyond compulsive repetition and reprisal. This is a point to which I return. Second, in situating this moment of crisis as well as the lead-up to it in *taşra*, the film draws a connection between the place of *taşra* and the characters' stuckness in a stagnant relationship. By way of its dominant, pre-1980s figuration as a domain of insipidity and barrenness, *taşra* indeed resonates with the conditions of the couple's lifeless and vacuous relationship, arrested in chronic disputes

that do not get resolved—even as it also becomes the site where a kind of “resolution” becomes possible.

For the marginal conditions of *taşra*, its distance from the center, precipitate in İsa a recognition that his own life is marginal and peripheral and spurs his decision to end the relationship. The film invites such a reading by sequencing the break-up after the dinner scene with friends. The friend’s description of *taşra* life as “boring” and empty disquiets İsa. This is a moment of realization that the life he leads in what is considered a bustling metropolis uncannily resembles his friend’s in *taşra*. Inhabiting *taşra*, even temporarily, exposes the fragility of the border between inside (city) and outside (*taşra*), rendering his current circumstances intolerable. In this regard, ending the relationship appears to him as one immediate way out of dissatisfaction, out of the “stuckness” and emptiness that have come to be his life. As he later on suggests to a different friend, İsa believes that being single and independent will deliver the fulfilling life that he has always desired.

Yet, the break-up does not change much in İsa’s life. Neither his work nor his personal life appear to provide him with the contentment he seeks. Just as before, he is unable to make headway on his research for an associate professorship. He is not only stuck in the project, but he seems to have lost interest in and motivation for it. The project has become a burden that he wishes “to rid [himself] of.” In his personal life, too, he suffers from an inability to imagine change and difference. Upon returning to Istanbul he undermines the possibility of a “new beginning” after the break-up by moving “backward” instead, into an affair with Serap, the fiancée of one of his friends with whom he had already had a fling while with Bahar. The affair is not only futureless—as

neither İsa nor Serap indicate interest in a long-term relationship with each other—but it is also driven mainly by a toxic power struggle. Yet, perhaps it is precisely the absence of future prospects that surreptitiously appeals to İsa about the relationship. Not having to think about a beyond releases a person from his/her obligations to the other while quelling the anxiety around uncertainty, the fear of disappointment, injury and failure. İsa's relationship with Serap is safe in this particular sense and facilitates the pleasures of instant gratification in its exclusion of future-orientation.

The affair with Serap is one symptom of the peculiarity of İsa's relationship to others. That mode of relation is perhaps best described as a *refusal* of connection and a commitment to isolation. İsa is rarely shown interacting with others. Except for the few secretive meetings with Serap, casual exchanges he has with his colleague at school (with whom he shares an office and occasionally plays tennis), the visit to the friend in *taşra* (whom he has not seen in years) and the afflicted relationship with Bahar, he lives a life of solitude. Furthermore, his mode in these relatively “close” engagements as well as in the sporadic, more quotidian ones is one of detachment, cynicism and indifference. His conversations are marked by a quality of sarcasm, boredom and disgruntlement. He repeatedly teases his colleague (who is about to get married) either about the tedium and petty bickering that await him in married life or about how he will crush him in the next tennis match. His “connection” to others thus evinces a kind of antipathy to connection, an aggressive competitiveness and disparagement that confirms rather than alleviating his isolation.

The extent of İsa's self-involvement and misanthropy is most vividly exposed towards the end of the film, through his treatment of a cab driver who takes him around the historical sites in Ağrı, a *taşra* city in eastern Turkey. While taking pictures of the sites for his research project, İsa asks the driver to pose for him, with rather firm and crass orders, because he wants a "figure" to complement his composition of the shot. The driver then asks if he could have a copy of the picture. Bothered by such a request, İsa suggests he go to a local photographer if he wants a picture of himself. When the driver refuses to be deterred, İsa takes the piece of paper with the driver's address on it, only to throw it away in the next scene when he is alone. Others seem to be for İsa not people with their own feelings, thoughts, needs and expectations but more like hollow figures with functions—functions that they ought to perform submissively, without delay, inquiry or challenge, to satisfy his immediate needs.

İsa is not the first of such characters in Ceylan's cinema. Muzaffer in *Clouds of May* (1999), Mahmut in *Distant* (2002) and to a certain extent Doctor Cemal in *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011) are all embodiments of a particular modern, urban, educated, middle-/upper-middle class male subject of post-1980 Turkey whose principal relational mode to the world is one of exploitative cynicism and detachment. One way to make sense of this new male subjectivity is to think of it as an effect of the loss of grounding that the military coup occasioned; of the integration into global capitalism that took place in this period; and of the unravelling of a particular fantasy of masculine power constructed on notions of mastery, authority, self-sufficiency, and invulnerability.

In an essay on the cultural and political climate of post-1980 Turkey, Nurdan Gürbilek describes the situation as the “bankruptcy” of the ideology of (collective) promise. As she elaborates: “However crude or hypocritical, authoritarian Kemalism has always included within itself a promise of modernization and civilization [for the people]” (2007: 107, my translation). That is to say that, despite repressive practices, the Kemalist project of modernization managed to sustain legitimacy in the eyes of the people partly through the promise of prosperity and welfare for all—even though this was a promise whose realization was constantly deferred to some future time. In this sense, satisfaction of collective desires—like social justice, economic equality, equal access to basic services, etc.—was deemed possible and only a matter of time and perseverance. As Gürbilek implies, this was partly why Kemalism’s elitist paternalism and suppression, as well as the forms of privation that particularly affected the lower classes and those outside the centers, were more or less tolerated; for *individual* sacrifice was regarded as necessary until the *collective* dream, so to speak, was realized.

With the 1980 coup, however, a shift took place in this ideological configuration. Prior to the coup, not only were the state and its institutions—the deliverers of the promise—in crisis, but political instability, large scale unemployment, steep inflation and failure in the implementation of necessary social and economic reforms created massive social unrest. This in turn fueled violent encounters between right-wing and left-wing political groups and organizations. Patently, the paradigm of “deferred promises” was exhausted. What replaced it was, first, the draconian military rule—unfettered and unaccountable state violence—and then, as the structural adjustment policies came into

effect, the rule of the market. While the violence of the latter was less easily discernible than the former, its psychic effects were more diffuse and extensive, affecting peoples of all political affiliation, class identification, ethnicity, and religious attachments.

What Gürbilek identifies as the bankruptcy of the ideology of promise in the particular context of Turkey is evocative of what Todd McGowan (2004) conceptualizes, within a broader framework, as the transition from “a society of prohibition of enjoyment” to “a society of commanded enjoyment” in the age of global capitalism. I want to elaborate a bit on McGowan’s deliberations for they help us understand the connections between the kind of affective crisis that İsa embodies in the film and the transformations of global capitalism. These discussions will also be pertinent as I explain how the narcissism that global capitalism cultivates and encourages leads to the metropolitan subject’s unsettling experience of himself inhabited by the *taşra* he seeks to expel.

According to McGowan, the society of prohibition, which includes traditional as well as modern societies organized under earlier forms of capitalism,

[...] required subjects to renounce their private enjoyment in the name of social duty, [whereas] today [in the society of commanded enjoyment] the only duty seems to consist in enjoying oneself as much as possible. [...] This marks a dramatic change in the way the social order is constituted: rather than being tied together through a shared sacrifice, subjects exist side by side in their isolated enclaves of enjoyment (2004: 2).



Through a Lacanian theoretical framework, McGowan explains that a society of prohibition does not aim at eradicating enjoyment altogether, but at regulating it through the Law of sacrifice. Subjects in this society are asked to give up something—total, private, individual enjoyment—for the sake of the whole. In return, they not only gain access to the symbolic order, but at the same time acquire recognition from it: “one gains recognition to the extent that one obeys [the Law of sacrifice...] In this sense, recognition signifies repression: the more recognition one receives, the more one has to give up to repression” (26). As such, the society of prohibition steers the subject towards the Other, the larger social order, in his/her search for recognition.

This is not the only way that the subject is oriented towards an engagement with the Other. Besides recognition from the Other, desire is “what one gets in exchange for the sacrifice of one’s enjoyment” (16). Insofar as desire is an effect of “sustained dissatisfaction,” or of enjoying oneself only partially, the society of prohibition, through the Law of sacrifice, produces desiring subjects who “experience themselves as lacking [and] they look to the Other for what they are missing [...] It is the subjects’ inability to enjoy completely that directs them to the Other, that creates a desire for what the social order seems to have hidden within its recesses” (16-17). In this regard, prohibition, in a paradoxical manner, carries the unintended potential of producing an “incipiently political subject” since “dissatisfaction carries the seeds of political dissent and of a desire to change the structure of social order” (137).

In contradistinction to the society of prohibition, the society of enjoyment commands that subjects enjoy themselves to the full. Put differently, the law of sacrifice

is downplayed or obscured to the extent that the social order purportedly promises direct access to full enjoyment. Immediate and fully satisfactory (yet always imaginary) *private* enjoyment is primary. This new economy of enjoyment has a series of effects on subject-constitution as well as on the subject's relationship to the Other. As McGowan explains, because the sacrifice that one has to make to ("really") enjoy remains inconspicuous to the subject, it creates the semblance that one can enjoy without having to sacrifice. In this sense, the society of enjoyment provides "imaginary enjoyment" (imaginary because it obscures the impossibility of total enjoyment) and an "illusory" sense of satisfaction and completeness.<sup>57</sup> When "subjects become increasingly incapable of experiencing dissatisfaction *as constitutive for social existence*," engagement with the larger social order diminishes (138, my emphasis). The personal and the private attain more and more significance as the subject recoils from the realm of the Other. Consequently, the idea

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<sup>57</sup> The concept of "imaginary enjoyment" in McGowan's usage draws from the Lacanian register of the Imaginary as the domain of specular images and the ego. Similar to the way the Imaginary provides the subject with an image of a unified, centered, complete self that s/he otherwise lacks, it also acts as a site that "allows the subject to visualize the enjoyment it lacks" (McGowan, 2004: 18). McGowan sees a complementary relationship between the dominance of the image (over the word) in the age of global capitalism and the increasing power of the Imaginary over the Symbolic in the society of enjoyment.

Imaginary enjoyment also takes place in the society of prohibition. Indeed, it is one of the ways in which a social order founded on prohibition sustains itself. It is through imaginary enjoyment that subjects find a "safe outlet for enjoyment" that is denied in the symbolic (18). What distinguishes society of prohibition from that of enjoyment, however, is the shift in the status of imaginary enjoyment. While in the former, it functions as a supplement/aid to the social order, in the latter imaginary enjoyment does not only gain dominance but is "actively promoted" (21). As McGowan further elaborates:

[in a society of enjoyment] we no longer experience the symbolic order taking its "bite" of enjoyment out of us, the extraction of its "entry fee." Nonetheless, the symbolic order continues in its constitutive role in our lives, though we become increasingly unable to experience it. This change in our experience allows us to imagine ourselves enjoying—not bound by the symbolic strictures that once deprived people of enjoyment. This enjoyment that we experience, however, is only the image of enjoyment, an imagined enjoyment [...] the society of enjoyment thrives on imaginary enjoyment (40).

that change ensues from making adjustments and modifications on the private/personal level becomes dominant.

As McGowan demonstrates in his comprehensive study, the results of all this on individual experience are narcissism, a certain kind of cynical posturing and political detachment. From within this theoretical framework, İsa's narcissistic and desensitized demeanour does not seem as inexplicable as some critics (such as Süalp) have argued, as it is a symptom of the shift in the enjoyment economy that transpires with Turkey's integration into global capitalism. *Climates* is insightful precisely in this regard: it renders visible, on the subjective level, the predicaments of the new *social* arrangements of enjoyment. As I explain below, *taşra* functions as a central, imaginative motif in the film that conjures these psychic effects of capitalist integration in post-1980s Turkey.

İsa's attempts ultimately fail at generating a substantial change in his life. They fail because these attempts have little if any bearing on the structure of his relation to others. Involving mainly modifications in the personal, private sphere and requiring minimal engagement with the outside social world, they continue to support and sustain the narcissistic isolation he is wrapped up in. Although these efforts seem to provide him with some immediate, imaginary enjoyment, he keeps returning to a state of non-fulfilment. Hence he is caught in a repetitious cycle. His narcissism and cynicism which on the one hand prevent him from forming close, responsive, caring relationships with others, are on the other sources of imaginary enjoyment. Indeed, cynicism, through the claim of mastery (or, disavowal of non-knowledge and lack) can feed into narcissism in the way it recalls the *image* of a self-sufficient and independent subject. In the particular

case of Turkey, where integration into global capitalism coincided with a tyrannical military rule that exacerbated the sense of emasculation, cynicism has also become an indirect means to claim the tenets of a baleful masculinity, especially amongst the urbanized, educated, middle/upper-middle class men.

The concluding winter section of *Climates* lays bare the workings of this cynical, narcissistic male subjectivity that İsa embodies, as well as the structure of compulsive repetition that he is trapped in. The section shows how even the inversion by which *taşra* becomes the site of potential movement fails to facilitate such movement, and does so because the urban male embodies subjective, degraded versions of the qualities formerly associated with *taşra*. In this last segment, İsa flies to Ağrı, a small, impoverished *taşra* city in eastern Turkey, in the hopes of reconciling with Bahar, who has been working on a film set there. Two scenes are significant in gauging the motivation behind this sudden decision. The first one involves a conversation he has with Serap in which he learns that Bahar is out of town. İsa is visibly disturbed when, after a barrage of questions to Serap, he finds out that everyone except him knows where Bahar is and what she is doing. *Not knowing* puts him out of his element, but also entails a bruising of his self-image. As Serap rubs his face in his “ignorance”—“you really didn’t know? How come you don’t know?”—his masculine confidence slowly dissolves. This is partly why he ends up in Ağrı: to replenish his tarnished sense of self, to regain mastery. This is also why he spies on Bahar for a long time in Ağrı before talking to her. He watches her all day from a distance as if to make sure no potential secret of hers remains uncovered; he wants to

have a total grasp of her current existence (to know and see *all*) so as to forestall any surprises that may divulge his vulnerability.

The second scene, which follows immediately after the one with Serap, entails another conversation; this time with his colleague at work. As İsa is looking through a travel guide for beach resorts, he expresses his intentions to travel alone to a faraway, warm place for the upcoming term-break. His friend questions the pleasures of travelling alone, suggesting that when he is on his own he experiences such places as “vacuous and kind of empty;” he gets “bored” and is “overcome by a sense of meaninglessness.” This conversation echoes the one at the beginning of the film where another friend of İsa’s described his experience of *taşra* as a “boring” and empty place *unless* there are friends around to share life with. Once again, words like “vacuous,” “empty,” “meaninglessness,” and “boredom” seem to unsettle İsa. Just as the first encounter with these signifiers disturbed him (because they were much too evocative of the conditions of his own life) and incited his decision to break up with Bahar so as to introduce movement into his life, this second encounter also disconcerts him. Thus, instead of going on his “dream vacation” on some Caribbean beach, he lands in the *taşra* city of Ağrı in the middle of a snow storm.

While such a move whets the viewer’s appetite for a happy ending—i.e., a regretful İsa decides to change, finds his estranged partner to demonstrate how he can become a loving, caring partner and the couple re-unites—the film does not humor such illusions about what constitutes change. Instead, it remains committed to the notion that unless subjects recognize their vital attachment to others—which is played down in the

society of enjoyment/global capitalism where subjects come to believe and act like they are independent, self-sufficient individuals—no real transformation of their existing conditions is possible. In this sense, the political efficacy of *Climates* also lies in its refraining from offering facile solutions to structural, systemic problems. Its ingenuity resides in *showing* (as opposed to resolving) the workings as well as the strictures of a particular subjectivity that the changing circumstances of post-1980s Turkey have produced. This subjectivity, as I have intimated, “contains” within itself what the metropolitan subject has hitherto disparaged as desolate, barren, boring and inert and projected onto *taşra*.

*Climates* ends in a way that draws attention to İsa’s inability to change, to his entrapment in a compulsive repetition that erodes transformation. In Ağrı, he asks Bahar for a “second chance.” He tells her how much he has changed, that he is now ready to settle down and bring up a family with her, make sacrifices, and “give up on all worldly pleasures.” “I swear there’s nothing I want for me in this life,” he declares, “I know I’ll succeed in making *you* happy [...] I’m ready to leave Istanbul if necessary and move to another place with you [...] What do you say? Just leave this job and come back with me.” What I find striking in these implorations is İsa’s inability to see their contradictions. His understanding of reconciliation ultimately requires Bahar’s submission to his terms and conditions. While on the one hand he is promising to accommodate her wishes and desires, on the other hand he does not show any interest in hearing what these wishes and desires might be. Instead, he assumes he knows what she wants and demands (more than once) that she suspend her life so that he can give her

what he presumes to know she desires. From the start, he also covertly associates having the kind of relationship Bahar wants with a life devoid of pleasure for him. In such a staging, while İsa gets the starring role—either as the master or the martyr—Bahar appears only as an extra through whom İsa feeds his narcissism. Put differently, despite him claiming the opposite, what İsa says and how he frames it actually revolves around himself. The idea that amorous relationships involve *two* people escapes him. Indeed, it is quite revealing that in his whole “spiel” towards recuperating his relationship with Bahar, İsa does not once enunciate the phrase “I love you” which, besides indicating a commitment, on a very basic level is a recognition of the separate being of the other. Engrossed in himself, İsa appropriates and treats his relationship with Bahar mainly as a source of narcissistic supply. As such he is unable to fathom a relationship through which two people construct a new life *together*, “from the point of view of Two, and not One.”<sup>58</sup> Beyond one that perpetuates the affirmation of the self-same, he cannot envision the

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<sup>58</sup> See Badiou, 2012. *Climates* can indeed be read as a complex gloss on Badiou’s conceptualization of love as harboring a potential to “[re-invent] life [...] from the perspective of difference [rather than] identity” (Badiou, 22, 33). According to Badiou, love is a “process” that “takes place over time” and through which a new world is “constructed” from “a decentered point of view other than of my mere impulse to survive or re-affirm my own identity” (25):

Love isn’t simply about two people meeting and their inward-looking relationship: it is a construction, a life that is being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two (29).

Rather than understanding love as a “fusion of two souls into one” (“the romantic interpretation” which remains committed to the idea of One), Badiou develops an understanding of love that retains the difference of the subjectivities of the parties involved (30-31). In this sense he insists on the idea that love “involves a disjunction between two people” and not a fusion or a synthesis. Indeed, it is the creative ways in which the challenge by difference is handled by two people that lend love its transforming potential. Evidently, such transformation is possible only through “[going] beyond the narcissistic,” through an openness to the other’s difference as well as to the risks, uncertainties and contingencies that “re-fashioning” a new life from the perspective of difference entails (19; 28).

possibility of a new, fulfilling, pleasurable yet necessarily altered life (for both of them), one that is created and nourished through difference.

As the following scene illustrates more clearly, there is no room in İsa's proposal for negotiation either. He is equally intolerant of delay or waiting. Therefore, when, after initially rejecting him, Bahar visits İsa in his hotel room at night, perhaps with a snippet of hope that this time they can work things out, it is already too late. This segment of silent images of blurry, fragmented body parts—close-up images of İsa's hand stroking Bahar's hair, her eye, a pair of hands, and arms—while suggesting some intimacy also portends a brokenness that cannot be pieced together. In the morning when Bahar wakes up and joyfully shares with İsa her “very beautiful dream,” in which she is flying over green meadows on a sunny day, blissfully waving at her long-dead mother, İsa remains unresponsive and wooden, repeating the same affect he projected after Bahar woke up from her dream of suffocation at the beginning of the film. On the one hand, the sequence is remarkably somber in its depiction of İsa's “stuckness” in impudent indifference, in an abiding incapacity to share or participate in the other's experience. On the other hand, it is also strangely elated in the way it implies that Bahar—whose flight distinguishes her both from the dead mother in this dream and from her own “deadened” self, as signified in the first dream through her burial—now has the aptitude to liberate herself from a stifling relationship.

What at first sight might seem like a bewildering volte-face in İsa's behaviour is actually consistent with the structure of narcissistic subjectivity I have described. To the extent that Bahar retreats from being a readily and immediately available object for İsa's



narcissistic appropriation, she loses her appeal for him. İsa is put off by Bahar's having a life of her own with joys, commitments and responsibilities that she is unwilling, or at least reluctant, simply to give up for him without deliberation. The curt and barbed remark he makes in response to Bahar's telling of her dream, about how she should not be late for work, is suggestive of his resentment for the basic fact that Bahar has a *separate* life. İsa reverts back to his accustomed ways of indifference and withdraws into the comforts of narcissistic reclusion, when he encounters the challenge of difference and the impediments or delays obstructing his need of instant gratification. Despite the claims he made the day before about how much he had changed, how he now felt determined to accommodate her wishes and make her happy, these last scenes in Ağrı make it evident that he has not changed much at all.

The film ends with a long, close-up shot of Bahar. This image of her, with a sad look as a tear runs down her cheek, is almost identical to the opening shot. Taking into account the second dream sequence in particular, I suggest that for Bahar this repeated tear no longer signifies anger, frustration, and the resistance to letting go that the tears in opening shot of the film implied, but instead expresses a mournful acceptance of separation. In this sense, she seems to have gone through a transformation, the details of which the film, perhaps to its detriment, omits. For İsa's story, however, which is central to the film, the repeated image of Bahar's dejected face takes on a different meaning. Through an ending that repeats the beginning, I see the film to be enacting İsa's stuckness in repetition. The sense of stagnation evoked by the reiterated image is reinforced also through the film's return to *taşra* at the end. This is not to suggest that the film associates

the literal, geographical space of *taşra* with repetition and immutability. Insofar as *taşra* connotes notions of isolation, detachment, vacuity, lack of vigor and desire, the film suggests that in the age of global capitalism one's actual location ceases to be the sole determinant of *feeling/experiencing taşra*. In approximating the experience of the metropolis (or the five-star beach resort) to that of *taşra*, *Climates* implies that the term no longer stands for only the distant and impoverished small town, but also for a detached and destitute self. A subject mired in cloistered narcissism—retreated inwards, confined to the private realm and disconnected from others; a subject shrunk and stunted by apathy and indifference, whose desire is suspended on account of an inability to let go of imaginary plenitude and the fantasy of self-sufficiency and invulnerability—such a subject is at heart a subject reimagined as *taşra*-incarnate.

#### **IV.2. *Three Monkeys*: *Taşra* within the City**

Ceylan's next film *Three Monkeys*, which was released two years after *Climates* in 2008, diverged in two significant ways from his earlier work. As Suner notes, prior to *Three Monkeys* Ceylan's oeuvre has always had a distinctive "autobiographical aspect" to it (2011: 16). Whether in terms of their setting (*taşra* towns Ceylan grew up in, or his own apartment in Istanbul), their cast (his family, friends, wife and himself) or the larger socio-economic and cultural world they depicted (bourgeois, professional), Ceylan's earlier films drew from and built upon material that was familiar to him. In *Three Monkeys*, however, Ceylan forgoes all such autobiographical reference points. Not only are the leading characters portrayed by professional actors, but more significantly, they

belong to a different class than and have a thoroughly different habitus from that of Ceylan and his archetypal characters. The main figures in *Three Monkeys* are not the educated, middle/upper-middle class urbanites whose stifling lives constituted the focus of most of Ceylan's films heretofore, but members of an underclass, immigrant family who try to survive and invent a new life for themselves at the fringes of the big city.

The second major novelty of *Three Monkeys* is the absence of a literal *taşra* in the film. While with *Distant* and especially with *Climates* Ceylan's cinema had already moved into the city, *taşra* still appeared in these films visually, even if primarily as a reference point to enable the conjuration of its metaphorical elaborations and invoke affective circumstances. The disappearance of *taşra* in *Three Monkeys* from ocular view, however, does not mean that the *concept* of *taşra* drops out of Ceylan's work. Indeed, I argue that *taşra* is embodied in the immigrant family within the city. The mark of *taşra* is inscribed onto their existence in Istanbul through their physical, socio-economic and cultural positioning in the city. To elaborate this point, a revisiting of some of the ideas I put forward in the first chapter concerning the configuration of *taşra*-center relations in post-1980s Turkey is necessary.

As discussed in that chapter, the domestic migration from the peripheries into the cities that started in the 1950s has accelerated immensely since 1980s, mostly because of structural adjustment policies that caused unemployment rates in the peripheries to soar. Elimination of agricultural subsidies, introduction of the competition of transnational agribusiness, and downsizing of public sectors are some of the reasons behind large-scale unemployment. The civil war conditions in the eastern regions have also forced massive

numbers of people (predominantly Kurdish) to move into the large cities in the western part of the country. Economic growth in the centers, on the other hand, lagged far behind the population growth, unable to equably accommodate (in both senses of the word) the labor surplus under the existing system. The result, as we have witnessed in urban spaces all around the world under the conditions of global capitalism, was “the development of massive class inequalities in employment, education, security, housing, and ‘the right to the city’” (Balibar, 2007: 57).<sup>59</sup>

What concerns me most for my purposes here, however, are the implications of these developments on the already existing tension between *taşra* and center. What happens, for instance, when a spatially, temporally, culturally distanced other “becomes unidentifiable as a result of transgressing borders, which otherwise are essential in maintaining social order”? (Yeğenoğlu, 2012: 36) What happens when what has so long been cast out and marginalized is dislodged from its assigned place on the outside and arrives on the inside?

Such destabilization of boundaries found one immediate, material expression in the re-organization of urban space—in the reinscription of “borders,” in new and different ways, *within* the city. The expansion of *gecekondu* districts (squatter settlements) and the formation of new inner city neighbourhoods represent the new face of demarcation within the city. As sites of ethnic exclusion and economic marginality, these areas have become what Balibar, in the context of French *banlieues*, describes as “*a frontier, a border-area, a frontline*” in the way they “form a periphery at the very center of the great metropolitan

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<sup>59</sup> Also see Davis, 2006.

areas. [They materialize] the displacement of frontiers toward the center” (2007: 48).<sup>60</sup> In this context, writing about the changing faces of *taşra* in post-1980s Turkey, Bora states that while *taşra* as small town might have started to decline in this period, the cities have become provincialized (*taşralaşmak*):

We see the face of *taşra* no longer only in the remote towns of the Anatolian steppes, but in the most modern and ‘worldly-wise’ locations [...] This is the eternal ordeal of Turkish modernization: the urban culture lacks the power and ‘quality’ to absorb a large population that flows, at a great speed, from *taşra*. The result is the spilling over of *taşra* into the city. To put it in ordinary language, Istanbul now contains a Sivas [a provincial city in central Turkey] bigger than Sivas itself (2005: 40, my translation).

The problem, however, does not consist simply in an inability to “absorb” the surplus population, but in how the city deals with—what it *does* with—these bodies who already bear the mark of undesirability by virtue of their *taşra* origins. Subjected to the double discrimination of classism and cultural racism, and relegated to the *gecekondu* and inner city neighborhoods, these bodies are neither fully outside nor inside the city (Balibar, 2007). They are “not outside” not simply because they reside within the city, but also because they cannot be *totally* excluded from its self-understanding, as they contribute to the economy of the city often as precarious labor (in both formal and informal sectors)

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<sup>60</sup> The colonial history of France has much to do with the formation of the contemporary banlieues that Balibar talks about as their occupants are mostly postcolonial immigrants from former colonies. In this sense, Turkish *gecekondu*s and French banlieues have their own particular historical conditions of existence. However, structurally, they can be perceived as the local symptoms/projections of shared global phenomena such as “the accelerated deterioration of urban environment and public services, massive long-term unemployment, ethnic and geographic stigmatization” (Balibar, 2007: 50)

and as consumers. They are neither inside, however, because they are denied full rights of a citizen to the city, at the very least on the basic level of access to public services.

Indeed, access to even fundamental necessities—such as electricity and water—is difficult and often requires the use of illegitimate means in some of these peripheral neighborhoods within the city. What these circumstances engender, in turn, is a new and egregious social category of the “internally excluded.” In Balibar’s description this category corresponds to those groups who are constituted as “eternally *displaced (out of place)*.” They are:

‘pariahs,’ not in the sense the term had in its original context (a ‘caste’ outside the system of legitimate castes) but that it acquired in modern Western society [...]: groups that find themselves denied, in principle or in fact, the right to have rights (that of *having* them or having the use of them, and above all that of *claiming* them) (2007: 57).

In this respect, I maintain that the *taşra* that figures in *Three Monkeys* is one that tallies with the category of “internally-excluded.” What the film brings to view is this new incarnation of *taşra*—embodied in the immigrant family—as a frontier *within* the urban space in post-1980s Turkey.

One of the first key pointers of the family’s condition of internal-exclusion lies in the location of their apartment. Situated by the old city walls, in a low-income neighbourhood of Yedikule, the apartment is on the top floor of an extremely narrow building, which looks like it is on the verge of immanent collapse. Train tracks that run right in front of the building, separating it from a major artery which connects the city to

the main airport, draw attention to the banlieue status of the location. Inside, the space is claustrophobic: crammed with old furniture under very low ceilings, the rooms spread over onto each other which hardly ever permits privacy. Ceylan's use of interior light and color (what Suner (2011) refers as "sickly" tones of green and yellow) further establishes the sense of isolation and deprivation that envelops the family.

Intriguingly, this apartment with a dark and depressing interior has an unrestricted, wide and beautiful view of the open sea from the living room and the terrace. I read this rather curious juxtaposition of restriction and expansion to be indicative of the paradoxical logic of internal exclusion—of the way in which the family, while structurally integral to the functioning of the city life (particularly through labor and consumption), cannot partake in that life as a shareholder. Even though they are not "formally" excluded from the city, they occupy a place of mere onlookers. All they can do is to watch from a distance the breathtaking view of the sea, the passing of trains, cars and planes as this luring, energetic and dynamic life unfolds before their eyes in oblivion to their existence.<sup>61</sup> The film's particular positioning of the family within the city, in close proximity to technologies of mobility, to which they have limited or no access, also highlights more palpably their (socio-economic) immobility.

It is the desire to move from this state of immobility and "partial" inclusion to mobility and full inclusion that propels Eyüp, the father, to assume a crime he did not commit. When his boss Servet sleeps at the wheel one night, killing a pedestrian and

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<sup>61</sup> This echoes Gürbilek's idea that living in *taşra* means living a life in the shadow of "the promising lights that flicker in the distance. There is a world out there that waits and beckons [one]." The lights invoke hope at the same time as they indicate a life that one is withheld from yet some others are believed to enjoy (1995: 56, my translation).

fleeing the scene in panic, he pleads with his private chauffeur Eyüp to take the rap for him. In Servet's entrepreneurially-gear'd rationality, this is a situation that can be resolved through a basic cost-benefit calculation: Given the upcoming elections in which Servet is running for office, his political career would be over even before it began if his involvement in the fatal accident became public, whereas Eyüp does not really have anything to lose except for "six months or a year at worst" in prison. In fact, Servet implies that this would really be a beneficial deal for Eyüp since he would not only continue to pay his salary regularly when he is in prison, but also give him a lump sum at the end of his sentence so that he could follow his ambitions once he comes out.

The offensive and discriminatory presumptions that enable Servet to make such an offer in the first place are discernable despite his sugar-coating of the deal. The gesture encapsulates the basic tenets of class and cultural racism which constitute the poor migrants from *taşra* as less human to the extent that their time—indeed, their lives—is always-already empty, insignificant, unproductive and hence disposable in comparison to the valuable, productive and meaningful time/life of the more affluent urbanites. For Servet to even raise the issue with Eyüp, he must have already formed an opinion about Eyüp's existence as so abject that prison is no more a "waste" of his time than the life he is already living.

Eyüp, on the other hand, finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. Accepting the offer would mean becoming an accomplice in a crime. Yet in declining it, he would let slip away perhaps the only shot he has to free himself and his family out of the life that they are caged. To put it in different terms, he must either choose complicity for the sake



of socio-economic mobility and potential inclusion (and ironically, he has to first submit to another form of exclusion by going to prison) or continue to remain indefinitely in the category of internal exclusion.

The bargain is instructive on another level, too. While the modernization project failed to deliver its promise of development and welfare for all, and its institutions along with the ideal of “common” or “collective” good have been corroded by neoliberal policies and their belief in a self-actualizing, competitive individual, those (like Eyüp) who are most aggrieved by such transformations, have turned towards other, informal and often illicit means for immediate relief from their conditions. In this sense, the bargain between Eyüp and Servet represents one such short-term solution—a fundamentally economic one—to a long-standing predicament of modernization and also testifies to the forced submission of the urban poor to the entrepreneurial logic of neoliberal self-making. Thus when Eyüp agrees to take on a crime he did not commit, he thinks that when he comes out he would at least be able to fashion a new and improved life for himself and his family. Yet, even this sliver of promise turns out to fail as by the time he is out, the only remaining institution of support, the family, is also incinerated. To see how the symbolic death of the family ensues, we have to look at what happens to the other two members in Eyüp’s absence.

Problems start when the mother, Hacer, is left alone to deal with the unruly and rather despondent teenage son, İsmail. While working full-time in an industrial kitchen, Hacer has little time to keep an eye on İsmail, who, having failed the national university entrance exam, has now joined the ranks of the unemployed. Interested neither in

continuing his education nor in working at the dead-end jobs that Hacer tries to get him through her limited contacts, İsmail spends his life adrift, wandering around aimlessly, staring off into space and sleeping for hours on end. For him, the way to break out of (internal-)exclusion and escape the fate of his parents lies in “becoming his own boss.” Thus, İsmail seems to have already internalized the ideology of the entrepreneurial individual who is supposed to shape, control and manage his/her own welfare. However, starting his own private business carrying school children requires start-up capital to buy a car. Hacer resists İsmail’s pressures at getting her to ask Servet for an advance payment on the money the latter owes to Eyüp for taking the blame, until one night İsmail comes home late, bruised and battered. Concerned about her son’s delinquent behaviour, which she is unable quell by herself alone, she makes a bargain with İsmail. She agrees to meeting with Servet to ask for the money, but asks her son not to tell Eyüp about it. It is as if, the film suggests, the first clandestine bargain between Eyüp and Servet leads to, or reproduces itself in, other forms of secretive acts amongst the family members. I am not referring here only to the criminal nature of the first bargain, but also to Eyüp’s handling of it in relation to his family. His refusal to include his wife and his son in a decision that impinges upon the lives of them all acts like a precedent, warranting other kinds of clandestinity within the family unit. The film continues to show how the initial deal, which marks the beginning of the family’s re-organization along neoliberal logic and principles, sets off an interconnected series of furtive acts, and, slowly yet steadily, contaminates the idea of commonality on which the institution of family rests.

Hacer's meeting with Servet, for instance, held in secret from Eyüp, prompts the beginning of an affair between the two, which, in turn has to be kept secret from the public eye, and especially from Eyüp, İsmail and Servet's family. Her visit comes at a time when Servet is in the middle of a tantrum about his recent election defeat. He treats Hacer contemptuously at first as if she is a nuisance and tells off his secretary in front of her for "sending in every visitor." The shame and humiliation Servet inflicts on Hacer, who was already bashful about asking for the money, are exacerbated when she cannot find her cellphone, which loudly rings from her bag, filling the silent room with the melancholy tunes and maudlin lyrics of a song ("E mi" by Yıldız Tilbe). In its expression of pain, resentment and spite in the face of unrequited love, the song is a classic example of the arabesk genre—a genre that has been popular since the 1960s among migrants in the big cities and abhorred by secular, Western-oriented, educated, urban elites on the basis of its "impure" structure (influenced by Arabic, especially Egyptian music), its embodiment of an undesired, hybridized urban-rural/urban-*taşra* culture, and its endorsement of self-pity, disconsolation and fatalism.

The arabesk song which abruptly interrupts the encounter between Servet and Hacer and then appears again later in the film at several occasions has some special significance. In the first place, it constitutes a key indicator of the objectionable, highly censured, *taşra*-based difference that the family embodies. Prior to the deal, the professional relationship between Servet and Eyüp has rendered such difference mute and innocuous, hence "tolerable," insofar as the latter did his job. In other words, the cloak of professionalism has made it possible for Servet to keep his distance from the otherness

that Eyüp (and his family) epitomizes. The deal, however, has compromised such safe distance as the scene with Hacer demonstrates. Servet is irritated by Hacer's presence not only because it reminds him of the crime he wants to forget, but also because he experiences it, in bad faith, as an intrusion. The arabesk song is a summation of unwelcomed *taşra*-difference (of which Hacer is the embodiment) which suddenly becomes overly-proximate in its eruption into Servet's office. There is a parallel here between the way Servet responds to Hacer and the way urban elites respond to the influx of migrants, especially since the 1990s when Turkey's integration into global capitalism intensified domestic migration to the centers. Just as Servet feels bothered and imposed upon by Hacer, urban elites, in their unquestioned assumption of privilege and entitlement to the city, have perceived the migrants as sources of annoyance and as "invaders" whom they now, grudgingly, have to "tolerate." Common to both is a forgetting—a disavowal—of the fact that the prosperity, convenience, and functionality of the (city)life that they perceive to be "invaded" largely depends on their complicity, if not direct involvement, in the exploitation of the despair of the so-called invaders.

Before I go on to discuss the second significance that the recurrent arabesk song bears in the film, I want to elucidate one other point about the affair between Hacer and Servet. Despite what one might wishfully (yet precipitately) assume, this affair signals neither the end of exploitation nor the deferential acknowledgement of difference. Rather, it exemplifies an instance when exploitation disseminates into the sexual economy. For Servet, the relationship is mainly sexual and its appeal lies in its provision of an immediate remedy for the rebuilding of his shattered male confidence after the election

defeat. The absence of scenes that would convey a sense of romance, affection, or care also attests to the primarily carnal nature of the affair—at least for Servet. For Hacer, though, the relationship offers both an opportunity to explore her dampened sexual desires *and* a promise to free herself from the unfulfilling, insignificant life that she feels trapped in. In this sense, her individual investment in the affair is so intense in its multidimensionality that even after her son discovers the affair and Eyüp gets out of prison, she does not desist from following her desires. This poses a significant threat to Servet who is apprehensive about losing his family, his status and even his life if the affair gets discovered. Echoing the way he dealt with the car crash, he tries to resolve this situation, too, by evading his responsibility in it. At the end, it becomes clear that Hacer is as disposable an object for him as Eyüp was when his interests are at stake. In the scene where Hacer gets unhinged upon hearing Servet's decision to end the relationship, there is nothing left of the latter's self-declared "sensitivity" and "altruism"—qualities he boasted of when he was trying to seduce her. The scene depicts male violence and misogyny with harrowing detail, while rendering visible the readiness with which such socially-sustained violations around gender get grafted onto cultural and class racism: Servet's threats and insults at Hacer rapidly coalesce into a metropolitan hostility towards *taşra*. Echoing the prevalent, discriminatory constitution of migrants as parasites or viruses who feed off of resources on which they, allegedly, have no right, Servet calls Hacer, and her "whole family," "leeches" that he does not want "near" him.

Besides functioning like a shorthand for the family's abjected difference, the replaying of the *arabesk* song is significant on a meta-level, too. More specifically, I read

the enigmatic interjections of the song into the narrative—always through Hacer’s cellphone—as a subtle salutation to the genre of arabesk films of the 1980s and 90s. Indeed, the story in *Three Monkeys* itself repeats in a *revisionary* manner the familiar narrative of the big city melodrama that was the focus of the genre.<sup>62</sup> One strand of these arabesk films centered on migrant characters who came to the big cities from *taşra* in search of a better life. However, as these films invariably portray, in the corrupt metropolis, the ill-equipped naïve migrants get easily lured into dirty business and their innocence chips away. The characters, incapable of resisting the inexorable forces that incrementally induce pain and suffering, resign themselves to fate. In these highly conservative, patriarchal narratives, injury (particularly male injury) is eulogized at the same time as its sublimation is stunted by a latent investment in the idea that changing life’s conditions is simply beyond one’s control. As family ties disintegrate, this brings on the irredeemable destruction if not the deaths of the main characters.

Ceylan’s film repeats the basic tenets of this story-line while revising them towards a conclusion that diverges significantly from those of the conventional arabesk movies. In *Three Monkeys*, too, migration proves harmful, and things go from bad to worse for the main characters, as they are wont to do in an arabesk film. After Eyüp’s nine-month sentence is over and Servet leaves Hacer, the family is faced with yet another trial: İsmail, who prior to the break-up discovered his mother’s affair, kills Servet later on. Yet, rather than giving in to fate, the family strives to “manage” the mess that has become their life. This, as it turns out, comes at a high price. Eyüp, devastated by the revelation of

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<sup>62</sup> Similar to their musical counterparts, despite their popular reception, *arabesk* films have been objects of ridicule and disdain amongst urban elites and high-art film circles.

his wife's affair and broken down by his son's murderous act of revenge, seeks a solution by striking a deal with Bayram, the errand boy in the local coffeehouse. Bayram, also a migrant, works for peanuts at the coffeehouse where, having no family or income to rely on, he is also forced to live and sleep. As Eyüp tries to convince him to take the blame for his son in return for a lump sum of money, he repeats to Bayram the words he himself had heard from Servet at the beginning of the film—only in a much more straightforward manner that intuits how, for the very poor, the brutal experience of immiseration can render prison preferable to the precarity of life outside:

What's the difference between you sleeping here or over there [in prison]? Winter is coming, Bayram. The coffeehouse is freezing at night. There you'll have heating. It's nice and warm. Three meals a day. You're still young. When you come out, you'll at least have a lump sum of money. You can set up your own business, open your own coffeehouse. What do you say?

The deal with Bayram, on the one hand, attests to the film's refusal to constitute the migrant family from within the submissive economy of arabesk movies. Eyüp is neither the naïve, passive victim nor the quintessential, self-sacrificing male hero of the arabesk genre, who is almost always, at least latently, glorified. Even though Hacer is the character who comes closest to an arabesk cliché (as femme fatale, especially in her stalking of Servet and melodramatic appeals to fate), she also defies this role in the end as she eludes death—the inevitable punishment allotted to such figures in the genre. What is remarkable is the way in which the film, twice, solicits the viewers' expectations about this only to explicitly undermine them: once, when a scene that shows Hacer climbing

over the terrace railings to commit suicide, turns out to be a fantasy of the distraught Eyüp; and a second time, when faced with the reality of his wife's suicide attempt, Eyüp concernedly commands her: "come down, don't be silly!" The film steers clear of both the fatalism and misogyny that arabesk movies cultivate.

On the other hand, the deal that concludes *Three Monkeys* also prevents one from leaving the film with a sappy optimism. It affirms a will for survival in the face of ever-growing setbacks, and yet by this time the family, which used to be the essential institution for survival, is destroyed by secrets, lies and betrayals that lead to the last deal between Eyüp and Bayram. None of these misdeeds are portrayed as consequences of fate, but follow instead from an economic and cultural system that endorses the myth of self-reliance for prosperity and prescribes an aggressive individualism as a solution for the inequalities that it has only deepened and diffused by dismantling the institutions of support (however dysfunctional or inadequate these might have been).

By emphasizing the gravity involved in the destruction of the family at the end of the film, I am not trying to make a moral point about the universal sanctity of this institution. Rather, I find its disintegration distressing because it is one of the last vestiges of vital support for the urban poor—something that provides a sense of solidarity that renders the conditions of internal-exclusion bearable.<sup>63</sup> The deal that Eyüp tries to strike with Bayram is significant in this context, too, for it draws attention to the erosion of class solidarity—an erosion that makes the family all the more indispensable as a source

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<sup>63</sup> The significance of family solidarity is concretely expressed in the film through Eyüp's repeated appeals to İsmail from prison: "Do we have anybody else to rely on, son, but each other?"



of care, cooperation and support. It also shows, more grimly, how the (internally-) excluded themselves reproduce the oppressive and exploitative language/logic of neoliberal salvation, in an effort to survive or be properly included in the city. Yet still the film makes clear that there really are no heroes or winners in a system which breeds injustice. Even Servet, who seems to reap the most benefits by virtue of his higher positioning on the socio-economic hierarchy, ends up paying (literally) for the covering up of his own murder—the money Servet pays Eyüp to avoid prison, goes to Bayram to hide the truth about Servet’s killing.

#### **IV.3. *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia: Taşra and Modernity***

Ceylan’s film *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* (2011) signifies a return in his oeuvre to the literal *taşra*. The vast, uninhabited steppes of inland Turkey are the setting for the story, which traces the 12-hour investigation of a murder. The all-male main characters, played by professional actors, are an assortment of figures from both *taşra* and center: Commissar Naci, Driver (Arap) Ali, murder suspect Kenan and the mukhtar (village administrator) are from *taşra*, whereas Doctor Cemal, Prosecutor Nusret and the Gendarmerie Sergeant Önder are from and/or representatives of the center. Indeed, more than the murder plot itself, it is this encounter between the figures of *taşra* and center that is pivotal to the film. The encounter entails moments through which the film suspends homogeneous and totalized conceptualizations of *taşra* as pre-modern and the metropolitan center as modern. “Pre-modern” and “modern”—commonly thought in terms of disjointed, sequential and internally homogeneous categories on the linear

progression of time—are shown not only to inhabit the same present, but also to be heterogeneous, containing within themselves elements that would ordinarily be deemed incompatible with their respective ethos. The *taşra*-center encounter is thus instrumental to the film's incisive critique of modernity. Through this encounter the film brings into sharp relief the limits of a modern will to translate and subjugate the diversity of human experience into the monolithic epistemological categories of rational, scientific thought.

*Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* differs markedly from the two Ceylan films I have discussed so far in that it brings to the fore and problematizes much more explicitly the supposedly technological and epistemological superiority of the center over *taşra*, imagined as “irrational,” “superstitious,” and “incompetent.” The center, embodied particularly in the characters of Doctor Cemal and Prosecutor Nusret, comes to *taşra* to shine the light of reason on it—to dissect its workings and illuminate its recesses—in order to find the missing body of the murder victim and solve the crime. However, as the film demonstrates, this project that counts on the distant, disinterested and piercing vision of modern science and law to master and “enlighten” *taşra* fails. Not only is scientific vision—the worldview of the metropolitan subject in the film—shown to be inadequate to the task, but also the Prosecutor, the embodiment of modern law, scientific skepticism and analysis, turns out to be deeply beholden to the “irrational” thinking that is commonly associated with *taşra*. Conversely, *taşra* characters evince a commitment to science and technology, which they regard as enabling the survival of their life-worlds.

Having said that, the film is not content simply with facile reversals of established binaries in attempts to revalue the devalued. Rather, such reversals are part of a

scrambling of preconceptions attached to *taşra* and center, which ultimately throws into crisis the borders between them. The Doctor is the focal figure in this process. Starting out as the dispassionate eye of skeptical scientism, the de-mythologizing metropolitan voice of reason and rationality, Doctor Cemal, by the end of the film, finds himself defying his own scientific findings with regards to the murder victim's cause of death. In doing so he can no longer sustain his position above the fray, but gets smeared—quite literally—with the blood and guts of human experience.

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The camera, through a murky window, slowly zooms from the outside into a shabby room where three men are chatting over drinks. This image, structured by a manifestly voyeuristic gaze—a gaze, while irresistibly curious and intrusive is at the same time safely distanced from its object—is the opening image of *Once upon a Time in Anatolia*. From here Ceylan cuts to a panoramic, stable crane shot of the dark, uninhabited, hilly steppes divided by a dusty, curvy road. Illuminated by nothing but the dimming sunset and the headlights of what turns out to be the cars of the investigation team, this image of *taşra* is a familiar one. Desolate, gloomy and sinister, this *taşra* indeed resonates with, if not affirms, one of its dominant representations in the modern Turkish imaginary. Even though this latter image is thematically very different from the former, they are connected formally through the anonymous gaze that looks in on them. From the very beginning, then, the film reveals how the inherited images of *taşra*, its most accustomed, “normative” representations, are informed by the power dynamics, fantasies, pleasures and revulsions of a kind of voyeurism.

What is remarkable about the film is how it starts with one unquestioningly-imbibed image of *taşra* only to modify it, subtly and unhurriedly, in its progression. What is even more remarkable, however, is how it does this not by trying to extricate more accurate, authentic or ideal images of *taşra* untainted by the voyeuristic gaze of the (modern) center, but by continuing to solicit such a gaze only to divulge its limits.<sup>64</sup> I will return to this point and, within a framework that considers the centrality of vision to modernity, discuss at some length the film's relationship to sight. But first I want to focus on the ways in which the film complicates the familiar image of *taşra* with which it opens.

In as much as the film depicts *taşra* as a dreary, destitute and ontologically barren place, it disconnects these spatial properties from their temporal and civilizational associations. In dominant conceptualizations of *taşra*, while absence (of wealth, resources, dynamism, etc.) gets readily articulated to a condition of pre- or anti-modernity, such a connection also occasions culturalist formulations about *taşra*'s inherent "primitiveness," its resistance to modernity and hostility to change. The film intervenes into this easy slippage by giving voice to *taşra* characters who are not only

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<sup>64</sup> In this respect, the film urges one to meditate on cultural critic Şükrü Argın's potent question: "Is it possible to look at *taşra* from the inside?" In his article with the same title, Argın argues that this is indeed an impossible endeavor for, *by definition*, *taşra* is the name of that place which is excluded, a place that is outside. The conditions of its very existence are bound up with a center that excludes it. Therefore, even the way it looks at itself always-already includes the look of the center: "The shadow of the center's gaze falls upon *taşra*'s gaze at itself" (2005: 289-92, my translation). There is no "pure" vantage point from the inside one can take to see what *taşra* really is.

*Once upon a Time in Anatolia* seems to me to be a film that recognizes this impossibility. This is why, instead of focusing on a task of making visible the object (*taşra*) in its most "authentic" form, it turns our attention to and makes visible the center's gaze that shapes the object.

open to change but also express an explicit desire for modern technology that would improve their existing conditions.

There are two particular scenes that drive this point home. In one, the Mukhtar—representative of the local government elected by the villagers—appeals to the Prosecutor to get the necessary funding he was unable to get from the district governor for the building of a modern morgue. According to the Mukhtar this is an “essential” need for the village, for they do not know what to do with their dead, especially in the heat of the summer. Immediate burial is not an option since the relatives of the dead, having long migrated to and settled in the centers, demand delaying the burial until they can arrange their return to *taşra* to bid their final farewells. All in all, such details suggest that the village has to modify its burial practices, “modernize” them so to speak, in response to the changing conditions of *taşra* which are themselves shaped by the forces of modernity. “There’s only old folk left,” the Mukhtar continues and “it takes someone to die before they [the relatives in the centers] think of the village.” In this particular sense, too, the modern institution of the morgue is “essential” to the village because its very survival depends on it. Insofar as death constitutes one of the few remaining occasions that gets *taşra* on the center’s map again—something that saves it from lethal neglect and abandonment—the building of a morgue, quite ironically, signifies the extension and vitalization of life for *taşra*.

Similarly, in one of the final scenes of the film, there is an exchange between the medical technician Şakir, a *taşra* dweller, and the doctor, which attests to *taşra*’s receptivity towards modern technology. Just before commencing the autopsy on the

murder victim, Şakir expresses to the doctor his discontent about the “lousy” state of their equipment, particularly in comparison to the “first-rate” kits he saw in the city hospital. Yet, akin to the Mukhtar’s experience with the district governor, his attempts at convincing the representatives of the central government to replace the existing out-of-date, manual tools with the more current, power-operated ones have come to no avail. In Şakir’s grievance, one can sense both a desire to participate in the modern and a frustration at being withheld from it. In this respect, if we are to talk of any resistance, I think it is more apt to talk of and scrutinize the center’s resistance in responding to *taşra*’s drive to modernize rather than that of the latter’s to modernity.

While these two instances indicate how (the desire for) the modern already inhabits the so-called “pre-modern” *taşra*, the film also illustrates how the “pre-modern” subsists in the modern center. The distinctions that separate the “pre-modern” from the modern, *taşra* from center, become undone at the scene during which the body of the murder victim is finally recovered. Commissar Naci, upon seeing that the body is buried hogtied, loses his temper and attacks the suspect. “Is that human, Mr. Prosecutor?” he bursts out. As he ventilates his sheer horror and disgust at what he is witnessing—“You killed him already, why tie him up like that? What about respect for the dead? [...] Are you so wicked? Are you not a human being?”—the Prosecutor calls for restraint, reminding him that there is still work to do which requires that he restrain his outrage in the name of prompt and impartial diligence.

As the embodiment of modern law, it is not surprising that the Prosecutor responds to Naci in a way that invokes professional aptitude, reason, rationality and efficiency.

Yet, these principles are utterly trampled upon in the course of the crime scene examination, which is marred from the start by sloppiness, inefficacy and incompetence, qualities commonly used to define and disparage *taşra*'s performance of basic tasks. Leaving aside the violation of the essential rules of forensic science (wearing gloves, for one) there is not even a body bag to transport the body to the hospital since, as it turns out, the Prosecutor's staff "forgot" to bring one. It is no one other than the Prosecutor himself who, at this point, proposes that the body be re-hogtied so that it can fit into the trunk of one of the cars.<sup>65</sup> This is indeed the most time-efficient solution for the Prosecutor. Throughout the night he had blamed Naci—by implication *taşra* incompetence—for prematurely summoning him all the way from the capital Ankara, for failing to follow through the necessary investigative groundwork into the whereabouts of the body, and thus, for wasting his time in an obscure and indefinite endeavour. Now that they have the body, he wants to leave as soon as possible even if this means stuffing the corpse into a trunk. In this manner the film, on the one hand, obscures the boundaries between the criminal and the lawful. On the other hand, through Naci's earlier reaction to the hogtie ("wicked" and "inhuman"), it also links the Prosecutor's instrumental rationality to a beastly, remorseless cruelty, exposing in this way the frailty of the distinctions maintained between the civilized, modern center and the brutish, pre-modern *taşra*.

This is not the only time that the figure of the Prosecutor becomes the locus of seemingly incompatible modes of being. In the midst of the unending and frustrating

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<sup>65</sup> During this scene, we learn that the suspect hog-tied the victim in order to fit him into the trunk of his car so as to be able to transport him to the burial site.

search for the body, the Prosecutor strikes up a conversation with the Doctor. He tells the Doctor about a past case involving the death of a woman which was so inscrutable that “you’d need to be less a prosecutor than an astrologer to find the cause.” The young and pregnant wife of one of his friends, “smart, educated and not in the least superstitious,” one day told her husband that she was going to die on a specific date. Just as she predicted she simply “dropped dead” on that day, a few days after giving birth, for no apparent reason. In response to the Doctor’s skeptical questions, which pursue a rational, logical explanation, the Prosecutor remains intractably committed to the idea that the woman’s death was scientifically inexplicable, as if it was a result of metaphysical forces, of the woman’s magical thinking.

I find it quite striking that the film sets up the encounter between “rational” and “irrational” thought, science and superstition, not between an enlightened, analytical, skeptical subject of modernity and that of the uneducated, illogical, unsuspecting subject of pre-modern *taşra*, as is usually the case in conventional representations, but between two modern subjects who are in fact embodiments of the two most foundational institutions of modernity: law and science. Furthermore, one of these modern subjects, the Prosecutor, is shown to be holding together in one body two allegedly incompatible worldviews. His public identity requires him to abide by the universal principles of skeptical and analytical thinking. As he himself acknowledges to the doctor quite sternly when the latter intimates self-poisoning as a possible cause of death: “if there’d been anything suspicious do you think I’d let it go [...] I’m a prosecutor. It’s my job to be suspicious.” Yet at the same time, he seems to be strangely at home with an explanation



which is nothing short of the irrationality and superstition that his public positioning as a man of modern law demands him to denounce, unravel and eradicate.

I will return to a more in-depth analysis of this encounter between science and superstition and discuss at some length the motive behind the Prosecutor's curious behaviour. Yet, such a task first requires us to examine the second larger critical gesture the film makes vis-à-vis modernity, which has to do with revealing the limits of a detached, dissecting, objective scientific gaze.

#### **IV.3.a. Sight and Smell**

The film's questioning of the adequacy of scientific method to discover truth, and to do so by way of an abstracted, spectatorial, objective gaze, is particularly pronounced in its treatment of vision. The ascendancy of vision "as the master sense of the modern era" and as source of knowledge is undermined especially in the first half of the film, which takes place in the profound dark of the *taşra* night (Jay, 1988: 3; 1993). The murder suspect Kenan, while having confessed to burying the body of the victim, cannot recall where exactly he buried it. Throughout the night he guides the search team from one place to another based on some visual clues he claims to remember about the site. However, the more clues he provides, the less clear it becomes where the body might be. First, he claims to have seen an old fountain at the site. Once taken to a site with a fountain, he deems this place does not quite "look like" where he buried the body. The site, he further claims, was located in a "flat, plowed field" with a "round tree" nearby. These are indeed ludicrous clues to begin with for in this particular *taşra*-geography there

are numerous old fountains (all looking alike) located near plowed fields (which are virtually everywhere) that contain “round trees.” Yet still, at each site, first the car lights and then massive light projectors of the military (provided by the gendarmerie team, i.e., the *taşra* extension of central military power) are mobilized to illuminate the area. Despite Kenan’s persistent reluctance and confusion at every single location he takes them, diggers are called on to work, but to no avail. At each site, Commissar Naci urges Kenan to “look around” carefully, but he loses more of his patience as the night advances: “You said tree, where’s the tree?” “Come here, this is a plowed field, is this it?” “You show me that tree or your family is fucked!” Kenan becomes the most convenient and “legitimate” receptacle of his annoyance, which is partly conditioned by the perpetual frustration of the investment in vision and its powers of extracting knowledge. Yet, technologies of vision are completely ineffective in this particular case since sight is not a reliable criterion for attaining or verifying knowledge in a place where qualities such as similarity and difference, diversity and uniqueness cannot be ascertained by visual perception. The search, insofar as it banks solely on the distanced yet penetrating capability of sight, is doomed to fail; and it unequivocally does.

This incapacitation of the sense of sight, which the film associates with the center and its ocularcentric epistemology, is accompanied by an insistent emphasis on another sense: smell. Indeed, the film, in a rather peculiar way, is infatuated with odor. Conversations about the smell of buffalo yoghurt (and how this is different from that of cheese), the smell of rotting bodies, of lamb and bread come into the narrative at different points for no apparent reason. In other words, these random dialogues, always initiated by

the *taşra* characters, do not connect in any way to the main plot nor lead to any insights about the search. How are we, then, to make sense of this fixation on smell? A cogent engagement with this question, I suggest, requires a theoretical consideration of the relationship between sight and smell.

Herbert Marcuse in his *Eros and Civilization* categorizes smell as a “proximity sense” along with taste which, for the perpetuation of particular forms of social domination, has to be subjected to “surplus-repression” (a historically-specific mode of repression besides the “basic repression” necessary for survival). As he elaborates:

The pleasure of smell and taste is “much more of a bodily, physical one, hence also more akin to sexual pleasure, than is the more sublime pleasure aroused by sound and the least bodily of all pleasures, the sight of something beautiful.” [Smell and taste] relate individuals immediately [...] Such immediacy is incompatible with the effectiveness of organized *domination*, with a society which “tends to isolate people, to put distance between them [...]” Their unrepressed development would eroticize the organism to such an extent that it would counteract the desexualization of the organism required by its social utilization as an instrument of labor (1962: 36).

As Le Guérér (2002) points out, besides its corporeality, its association with the flesh, the “animal,” the “primitive,” and the “instinctive,” the denigration of smell, particularly after the Enlightenment, also has something to do with the way it violates the fundamental terms of scientific investigation. The latter correlates attainment of rational knowledge with the practice of observing objects *from without*. In this regard, vision

assumes a privileged position as the “noble and intellectual” sense of scientific inquiry in that it necessarily entails detachment and distance of space between subject and object: “the externality of sight allows the observer to avoid direct engagement with the object of his gaze” (Jay, 1993: 25).

Smell, on the other hand, involves disintegration of distances and boundaries in its “penetrating strength and permeability” (Le Guérer, 2002: 3-5). In contrast to the sanitizing distance that vision sustains between object and subject, smell is often about leakage and infiltration: “it does violence to the sanctity of the self by opening it, exciting it, agitating it, independently of subjective intention” (Forter, 2000: 55).<sup>66</sup> In the way it breaches the borders separating the subject and the object, smell not only poses a hindrance to scientific inquiry, but also threatens its ruination. Indeed, its marginalization in the tradition of Enlightenment thought can be seen as a symptom of its perception as potential danger. By virtue of “its boundary-transgressing propensities and its emotional potency,” smell signifies a threat to “the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity,” to its dominant epistemological assumptions, methodologies and biases (Classen et al., 1994: 4-5).

Within this framework, I think that the film’s otherwise enigmatic emphasis on smell, and in particular its juxtaposition of this denigrated sense with the valorized one of sight, reveals its awareness not only of the tension between the two, but also of the

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<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Horkheimer and Adorno talk of the sense of smell as one that “bears clearest witness to the urge to lose oneself in and become the ‘other.’ [...] When we see we remain what we are; but when we smell we are taken over by otherness. Hence the sense of smell is considered a disgrace to civilization, the sign of lower social strata, lesser races and base animals. The civilized individual may only indulge in such pleasure if the prohibition is suspended by rationalization in the service of real or apparent practical ends” (1987: 184).

hierarchical dualisms such as mind-body, analytical-lived/experimental, abstract-concrete that modern science and epistemology constitute and operate through. Indeed, revealing the limits of these foundational binaries lies at the core of what I see as the film's astute critique of modernity at large.

Significantly, while advancing this critique, the film also avoids a common pitfall encountered in some critical accounts of modernity, which in their attempts to deconstruct binaries and articulate modernity's discontents and dislocations end up idealizing the "pre-modern." In this regard, I want to clarify that the film's highlighting of the olfactory and especially its association of the sense of smell with *taşra* characters do not indicate a primitivist longing, which, as some critics point out, is a palpable undercurrent in contemporary *taşra* films. As I argued earlier, *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* does not postulate *taşra* as a site that lies outside of modernity which, on account of such externality, enables or reactivates the more "bodily" senses that are subdued in the process of becoming modern. *Taşra*, to put it differently, is not depicted as a space unaffected by scientific, rational, abstract thought, and hence, by extension, as a space that is conducive to the cultivation of proximal/corporal senses that are presumed to be stunted in the modern metropolis. The film averts such a primitivist appeal by refraining from establishing smell as the sense that leads to resolution or truth. As I expressed before, the references to smell have no bearing on the outcome of the search or the resolution of the murder case. In this regard, the film does not get entangled in any effort to re-value smell as a more "useful," "becomingly human" or "non-alienated" sense than vision. There is no nostalgic call here for a return to some imaginary, originary

wholeness of the “pre-modern” as if to remedy the fragmentation and alienation occasioned by modernity. Instead, the preoccupation with smell is one way the film draws attention to the co-existence of other ways of knowing and inhabiting the world—to what Chakrabarty describes as “the plural ways of being human that are contained in the very different orientations to the world”—which get colonized, disparaged and effaced under the hegemony of a rational, scientific outlook (2000: 241).

The Doctor is the quintessential embodiment of this outlook. Throughout the film he maintains a calm, detached and impartial demeanor. Appointed to the small *taşra* town from the center, he is essentially an outsider, but one who has still garnered a certain sense of trust and camaraderie from the locals. He does not, however, reciprocate the sociability and fellowship extended to him. As discreet as he is about his personal life, the “Doctor”—as the locals call him in a way that underscores the impersonal distance he has established—also abstains from participating in small town gossip and limits his contact with the locals to a professional rapport with “patients.” It is this scrupulous neutrality he maintains together with his unwavering commitment to the power of scientific method to uncover the truth that renders the Doctor the epitome of the rational, logical, analytical modern subject.

As such he is immediately drawn to demystifying the Prosecutor’s narrative of the young woman’s death, to proving that there is no exception to the rule of reason. In this sense, we can read the film as having two parallel plots, as following two unresolved mysteries, both of which are subjected to the piercing gaze of scientific inquiry. The first one is what ushers the center to *taşra*. Equipped with modern knowledge and technology,

the center penetrates *taşra*: elucidating it, digging its insides out, surveying, mapping and measuring it to unearth the secret that it hides in its recesses. The second one entails the Doctor's unrelenting "interrogation" of the Prosecutor, his will to compose a rational, logical explanation to the woman's death by digging into the Prosecutor's past. While the first of these endeavours fails, the second one succeeds, albeit in a way that leaves the Prosecutor with a devastating realization and tarnishes the Doctor's investment in the unshakeable authority of science.<sup>67</sup>

"Nobody just dies because they say they will; there's no such death in medicine," the Doctor declares to the Prosecutor when he hears the story. He proceeds, with surgical precision, to cut open the Prosecutor's narrative, revealing one by one to the audience its inconsistencies and contradictions. He starts by probing the official cause of death. While initially the Prosecutor insists "there was *no cause*, it was the most bizarre death," later on he negates this statement in his objection to the Doctor's insistence that an autopsy would have revealed the precise cause of death: "You haven't been listening. *The cause of death was clear* [...]. You don't need an autopsy if the cause of death is clear. Because

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<sup>67</sup> As I discussed, the will to master *taşra*, to make it visible and accessible fails. The body is found not as a result of the exquisite methods and technologies of modernity—which only divulge their own limits in this process—but as an unforeseeable and incalculable effect of a highly contingent event. In the Mukhtar's house, where the search team decides to take a break and eat, the short and silent encounter between the suspect and Mukhtar's young daughter, who enters the dark room of men with a gaslight and a tray of tea for all, creates an intense psychic effect on the suspect. In a state of delusion, he sees the victim sitting by the window, sipping his tea with the rest of the men, breathing hardly for air. Shortly after, he confesses to Commissar Naci—the audience is denied access to the confession—not only the exact location of the body, but also the cause of murder: on a drunken night (the one that opened the film) he blurted out he was the father of the victim's son and the ensuing brawl left one of the men dead.

However, it would be erroneous to simply deduce from this that the film favors fate, the mystical, or the chance encounter *per se* over scientific method. Rather, the unravelling of this plot evinces how a pursuit that confines itself to the abilities of a dispassionate, detached eye to uncover the truth gets blinded to aspects of human experience that remain less readily assimilable to its logic.

it was clear. Heart attack.” The viewer, like the Doctor, can identify in these wavering statements a circular logic, whereby the truth of the claim (i.e., the “clarity” of the cause of death) is compulsively asserted without any substantive evidence, as if the repetition of the word “clear” will suffice and thaumaturgically actualize its meaning.

Through this exchange, then, the Doctor both exposes the implausibility of the Prosecutor’s account, collapsing the logic of superstition/magical thinking that pervades it, and gains access to a formerly obscured clue, the heart attack, which provides him an opportunity to delve further into the case to bring to light the real cause of death. Certain drugs, he hypothesizes, when taken regularly in high doses can bring about a heart attack as delayed effect. The idea that the woman was committing slow suicide confounds the Prosecutor: “why would the woman suddenly take the drugs for no good reason?” His distress as he listens to the Doctor’s deductions oozes from his body, almost literally, through the scars on his face, which have now become inflamed into much darker, internally-hemorrhaging wounds. From this point on, the conversation gets increasingly upsetting to watch, not only because of the pain and suffering it evidently inflicts on the Prosecutor, but also because watching the Prosecutor’s inexorable yet discreet descent into disintegration suddenly unfurls the invasive nature of the Doctor’s endeavour, through which our own voyeuristic pleasures have also so far been vicariously satisfied.

The Doctor, however, remains oblivious to the Prosecutor’s experience and continues to treat him as an object, as a mere dispenser of clues that aid his quest for truth. In the following scenes the line between scientific inquiry and invasive prying gets even more ambiguous as the Doctor, in his distanced and serenely-analytical way, poses



questions about the woman's personal life—whether or not she was getting along well with her husband—and extracts from the Prosecutor the last bit of information that dissipates the cloud of mystery which enshrouds the woman's death. Her husband had a fling, "some ridiculous thing [...] you couldn't even call it cheating [...] she really forgave him. They didn't even mention it again." To anyone with a little sense of intuition, and especially in the context in which they are uttered, these words indicate the self-deceptive rationalizations of a guilty conscience. Yet, what is by now painfully obvious to the viewer—that the husband in the story is none other than the Prosecutor—is somehow imperceptible or irrelevant to the Doctor. The latent aggression nested in his impassive, objective gaze attains a disturbingly poignant quality the closer he gets to consummating the task he had set out for himself. First, he wrecks the defensive delusion the Prosecutor had constructed by explaining that rather than indicating forgiveness, the woman's silence about the cheating was actually a symptom of her having made the decision to kill herself; and then, he unsentimentally implies that her suicide was an effect of her husband's infidelity, whom she wanted to punish with her death.

It takes a slip of the tongue—the Prosecutor's impulsive utterance "My wife..."—for the Doctor to finally recognize the gravity of his actions. This has to do with both what his scientific inquiry uncovered—the unsettling reality that the Prosecutor, however unintentionally, was culpable in his wife's death—and with what it has foreclosed from the Doctor's view. In the process of his dogged pursuit to discover the "cause of death," the Doctor's medical gaze can register neither the Prosecutor's embeddedness in the story that he recounts nor the suffering that his drive to uncover "truth" has caused.

The closing sequence of the film depicts the effect of such recognition on the Doctor, who ends up abandoning the position of the dispassionate and uninvolved observer/investigator that he had thus far staunchly maintained. Pointedly, this shift occurs at a moment that calls precisely for a rigorous wielding of the detached and dissecting medical gaze—during the autopsy of the murder victim—and yet the Doctor, without much demur, betrays its conclusive findings. Despite the irrefutable evidence the medical technician finds in the victim’s windpipe and lungs, the Doctor instructs his assistant to omit from his official report the actual cause of death, asphyxiation from being buried alive. We cannot make sense of this blatant transgression unless we take into consideration what had preceded it. The exchange between the Doctor and the Prosecutor that I examined before is crucial in this regard. On the one hand, it reveals to the former the limits of his epistemological orientation, making visible its instrumentalist, mechanistic and dehumanizing aspects. On the other hand, the exchange also discloses the messiness that the processes of knowledge acquisition always entail, and how the epistemic principles of positivist science—like objectivity (hence a clear subject/object distinction), exactitude, non-contradiction, strictly causal explanations, etc.—necessarily foreclose the perception of such messiness. Now, I read the Doctor’s transgressive act as an effect of the infiltration of this otherwise negated otherness into his vision. It is as if his exposure to and involvement in the Prosecutor’s story, in his pain and suffering, has left an indelible mark on his gaze, which now cannot subtract the messiness, the lived relations, or what Jay drawing from Merleau-Ponty calls “the flesh of the world,” from the object of knowledge and analysis (1988: 10).

Just before the autopsy, the Doctor witnesses how an enraged crowd of men try to lynch the suspect; amongst them is the young son of the victim who, filled with hatred and anger, throws a stone at the suspect's face. He also observes the reserved widow, first from a distance, then more closely in the autopsy room as the Prosecutor nonchalantly converts the particular bodily signs of her grief—her tears and muted gasps—into the impersonal language of medico-bureaucracy for them to count as evidence. The Doctor's omission of the ghastly results of the autopsy, then, signifies a defiant response to the violence of such reifying objectivism, of which he himself was guilty in his conversations with the Prosecutor. Reporting the victim's real cause of death would not only produce additional suffering for the bereaved (and for the suspect), but also breed more violence. To put it differently, it would mean reinstituting the indifference of specular distance and detachment.

The last minutes of the film punctuate the Doctor's abrogation of such distance in an explicit and literal manner. After the medical technician Şakir discovers dirt in the victim's windpipe and suggests that he was buried alive, the Doctor, following a brief moment of hesitation, dismisses the clear evidence—"No, it's nothing like that, but...let's say this: no abnormalities found"—and asks the technician to proceed with opening the abdomen. Şakir, disconcerted and unconvinced by the Doctor's verdict, first tries to resist by declining to continue. When the Doctor firmly orders him to do what he is told, he forcibly cuts open the abdomen, splattering blood on the Doctor's face. He advises the Doctor "to step back a bit" or he will get "stuff" smeared on him. His cautioning is rather moot at this point since the Doctor has already been smeared with

this “stuff”—with the messiness of the flesh/lived experience that has infiltrated and complicated his distant, disembodied, aseptic gaze and done so at the very moment he dismissed the scientific evidence. The ineffaceability of this symbolic stain is implied by the last image of the film, which shows the Doctor, from behind a window, watching the widow and her son as they leave the hospital, unaware that even after wiping it, a faint smudge of blood still remains on his cheek.

## AFTERWORD

In this dissertation I have explored different manifestations of *taşra* in a number of critically-acclaimed, contemporary cultural texts about Turkey. Because *taşra* is a concept whose construction as the provincial/peripheral is inextricably linked to the particular dynamics of Turkish modernization, I have approached it as a “central” site within which the internal fissures, contradictions, and discontinuities of this process are inscribed, hence legible. The project of modernity about which the *taşras* in these works are most instructive is the western-oriented Kemalist project, which has been losing its hegemonic power since the 1980s and experiencing a real crisis since at least the 2000s. In these concluding pages, I want to think some about this crisis and about the “new” ways in which modernity is being articulated in Turkey, especially in the very recent period while I have been writing this dissertation. Given the particular focus of the dissertation, my main objective in this discussion is to pose some questions regarding *taşra*’s place within this currently-developing discursive field and gesture towards the ways in which these questions might provide a guide for future research.

As I discussed in Chapter One, Turkey’s integration into global capitalism has, in the words of Taşkın (2008), enabled “the rise of ... new economic, political and cultural counter-elites.” As the neoliberal restructuring policies “weakened the traditional privileges of a state-affiliated bourgeoisie and intelligentsia [they] also opened up new opportunities for upward mobility for those societal actors who had long been left outside of the dominant power alliance of the national development phase” (56). The Justice and Development Party (known in English as AKP) that came into power with a sweeping

electoral victory in 2002—and has remained in power since then by winning two consecutive elections—is the latest embodiment of this class of “counter-elites.”

AKP has emphasized heavily their Islamic and peripheral “roots” to differentiate themselves from the traditional Kemalist elites, to question this latter’s legitimacy to power and to validate AKP’s own “populist claim of the authentic representation of the masses” (Taşkın, 2008: 59). In this discourse, while the period of Kemalist hegemony is constructed as one of repression and alienation where people were severed from their own “authentic cultural roots,” the “new Turkey” under AKP rule is presented as a “project” of revival and renewal of authenticity for the people. AKP leaders draw on their *taşra*-embedded identities and religious commitments as proof of their “oneness”/ sameness with the “authentic culture” and hence constitute themselves as the rightful representatives of the people. This discourse around legitimacy is more often than not supplemented by another one of victimhood. Besides the authentic culture, AKP claims to share with the people of *taşra* an experience of pain and suffering, i.e., their denigration by the Kemalist elites as “less civilized,” their oppression and exclusion on account of the “unalterable” provinciality that they are imagined to embody and because of their Islamic beliefs and practices.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Indeed, AKP’s appropriation of the racialized language of the middle classes who started using the term “White Turk” in 1990s to differentiate themselves from the “dark masses” can be interpreted in this context (Arat-Koç, 2007: 45). As Arat-Koç indicates, “White Turk” was originally coined as a critical term, but was later adapted “as a proud label” by the new middle classes who defined themselves as western-oriented urban professionals and as members of a global class with a particular lifestyle that evinces a mastering of the rules of global capitalism (49-50). Bora, in his article on the different types of nationalisms in Turkey, identifies the White Turk discourse as “a radical variation of liberal nationalism” that indulges in a “neoliberal chauvinism of prosperity” (2003: 441). While conveying a refusal to share wealth with underprivileged communities, this discourse also produces lower classes as “backward” and “of no breeding” and “brand[s] them as a different race” (442).

Strikingly, this discourse of resentment and victimhood is compensated by glorified re-writings of the imperial Ottoman past that AKP has reclaimed as another source of cultural authenticity. Contrary to the Kemalist will to disconnect from the Ottoman Empire, AKP has consistently evoked fantasy reconstructions of the Ottoman past as a period of glorious world dominance *and* peaceful coexistence of difference (i.e., Ottoman multiculturalism). This signifies a major shift in the political imaginary of Turkey. It involves a re-channeling of the investments in “being/becoming like Europe” which, as I have argued, are bound up with the idea of “catching up” and a frustrating experience of perpetual “belatedness.” These discourses, which have come to be identified as “neo-Ottomanism” by scholars and political commentators, do not so much convey a desire to be like Europe, but almost the reverse—a desire to influence and inspire Europe by providing a model for resolving its current predicaments, while challenging its domination in the Middle East by establishing Turkey as a leader in the region that

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A populist re-appropriation of this term can be detected in one of Erdoğan’s speeches where he evokes a criticism of the divisive quality of the term “White Turk” at the same time as he maintains the division to affiliate with the oppressed/“victim” and express solidarity with them: “In this country there are White Turks, as well as Black Turks. Your Brother Tayyip [Erdoğan’s first name] is from the Black Turks” (qtd. in Ferguson, 2013).

More recently, this discourse of victimhood has been mobilized in aggressive and even more polarizing ways to delegitimize all kinds of political dissent. During the uprisings in the summer of 2013, Erdoğan tried to portray the protestors, who were claiming their basic rights to the city, demanding the essential rights of freedom and equality and opposing the growing authoritarianism of the neoliberal AKP rule, as arrogant and patronizing racists. In one of the many inflammatory speeches he gave at the time, he declared:

According to them we don’t understand politics. According to them we don’t understand art, theatre, cinema, poetry. According to them we don’t understand aesthetics, architecture. According to them we are uneducated, ignorant, the lower class, who has to be content with what is being given, needy; meaning, we are a group of negroes (qtd. in Ferguson, 2013).

The rhetoric here aims at constructing the protestors, regardless of the different class positions and various political affiliations that founded the resistance movement, under one category—white colonizers/White Turks, who treat AKP and its supporters as “negroes.” The racism ingrained in Erdoğan’s own speech against black people, especially the use of the derogatory term “negro,” is discussed at some length in Ferguson’s journalistic piece.

embodies imperial benevolence as cultural heritage. More broadly, then, as Arat-Koç (2012) observes, neo-Ottomanist aspirations entail “a revival of imperial grandeur” and “a new claim to supremacy.” They involve “a comprehensive transformation of domestic and international politics” as well as “a reconceptualization of Turkish identity, a radical rethinking/assessment of modern Turkish history, including the place of Kemalism in it.”<sup>69</sup>

Internationally the sympathetic and supportive responses to these discourses and their practical outcomes did not last very long. Nationally, though, they seem to have more enduring effects, for despite a worsening economy, a series of high-profile corruption scandals, state-sanctioned abuses of rights and freedoms, a foreign policy that has worked to alienate both the West and the Middle East, and a pervasive culture of violence and impunity—despite all this, not only has AKP sustained its majority in the parliament, but also its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, after a decade of holding office as prime minister, became the country’s first directly elected president in 2014. AKP has managed, time and again, to garner votes from *taşra*, from the people who are hurt and betrayed most by the neoliberal policies of the very party that they support—such as the

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<sup>69</sup> Recently, a photograph of the Turkish president Erdoğan and Abbas, the President of Palestinian National Authority, caused a stir on social media. Taken inside the new \$600 million presidential palace that Erdoğan had got built for himself in Ankara, the photograph showed the two leaders shaking hands. In the background was a staircase where sixteen men, representing Turkic and Ottoman civilizations, were lined up in “warrior” costumes. While the kitschiness of the costumes and the whole mise-en-scène immediately generated a multitude of jokes on social media, the photograph was instructive about how far this fantasy around “reviving” and embodying imperial power went. It also revealed the intensity of the investment in this fantasy as an MP from AKP tweeted a controversial response saying that with Erdoğan’s presidency “the ninety-year commercial break [i.e., the Turkish Republic] to the 600-year Empire has ended.”



peasants, the small tradesmen (*esnaf*), and the domestic migrants who make up a large segment of the urban poor.

While AKP hegemony is overdetermined by a complex of factors, I want to propose a few questions here that might be helpful in figuring out the reasons behind its continued support and sustenance in/by *taşra*. For instance, to what extent do the constitution of AKP's hegemony and its continued support by *taşra* depend on a discursive shift that AKP has accomplished—a shift that involves producing and representing *taşra* as the “essential” site of Turkish identity rather than a peripheral one? We can ask this same question in a different form: To what extent does AKP's mobilization of votes depend on cultivating resentment, on an affective appeal to the deep-seated historical grievances occasioned by the experience of exclusion, by an induced sense of inadequacy and inferiority that has impaired *taşra*? Does not this politics of resentment, which requires a perpetual reproduction of the “wounded attachments” to past injury/exclusion in order to be able to continue to practice politics as such, ultimately undermine AKP's purported aim of ameliorating *taşra*, of restoring it to its rightful unmarred essence (Brown, 1995)? How does the deployment of neo-Ottomanist discourses fit in with the affective economy that AKP's politics of resentment thrive on? Are they, in their self-aggrandizing quality, meant to compensate for or replace the melancholic structure of national identity-constitution that the Kemalist modernization process generated? How do these discourses relate to the losses that occasioned this melancholic structure in the first place? Do they acknowledge and/or aid in working through these losses that produced the melancholic structure? Or is the desire for reviving imperial grandeur the reverse side of melancholic

self-beratement? Are there ways to imagine national identity in Turkey today which do not give in to narcissistic modes of subject-constitution, whether melancholic or self-inflating; which take the marginal, the oppressed, the disavowed—without fetishizing them—as the “center,” the starting point, of ethical political discourse and action? And what do the aesthetics of such imagination look like?

Providing responsible answers to these questions would require the labors of a future project.

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